

The Crooked Path

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A Journal of the Nameless Art

Issue 5: Spring 2009

with contributions by
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Well, despite the house being sold from under us, our car being totaled, and other personal adventures that I won't go into here, here is issue 5, slightly plumper due to an increase in submissions, and hopefully still making a name for itself.

Regular readers are probable aware of the demise of the Crooked Path podcast, due mainly to my dismay over some of the less-savory aspects of the Pagan community. Suffice it to say that while my enjoyment of the podcast has been soured, my love of sharing lore and practice has not, and this Journal will continue unabated. A bonus is that now I finally have the time - and fewer excuses to delay - to complete my Grimoire for Modern Cunningfolk.

There has been some other good news too. Pendraig has signed a distribution deal with New Leaf that makes a selection of our books available to over 7,000 metaphysical stores throughout the US. I'm pleased to say that the first hefty order from them has shipped, and pretty soon you will see our books popping up in your local store, or you will at least be able to order them there.



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MOVED BY THE SHAKERS

By Grace Victoria Swann

I love sex.

I mean I really, really, *really* love sex. And I make no secret of the fact that I most enjoy the spiritual practice of physical union as communion, as often as possible.

So, needless to say my friends were absolutely astonished – some even downright mortified -- when I revealed my intent last fall to spend a couple days New Gloucester, Maine with a well-known <gulp! say it isn't so, Grace, say it isn't so....> celibate, Christian religious sect.

Yes, I said celibate.

And yes, I said Christian religious sect.

What on earth would possess *me*, a good old-fashioned Pagan to cavort with “those people”?

Same thing that killed the cat: Curiosity.

But there were other reasons nudging me too. An old friend had just contacted me to update me on her life. In conversation, she revealed that she'd “transcended her earthly, bodily desires” and in this new, high-and-mighty way of living she realized that she no longer needed, desired or wanted sex because it was “beyond” her spiritually.

The sound of her voice rang with pride. My friend, in declaring she was “too good for sex” made me wonder about others who shunned physical desire. Did this celibate, Christian religious sect ooze New Age pabulum or shake fingers at those who chose a different lifestyle? Did they see themselves as “better-than” those who chose a different path?

Secondly, I felt a strange calling – a brotherhood – as it were, with these people. Like modern day Neo-Pagans in initiatory traditions, members of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (also known as Shakers) are self-selected during adulthood to be part of a spiritual family. Like ours, their path also defies traditional norms and is a calling with a multitude of responsibilities that requires taking action in order to fulfill obligations to our individual selves our communities, and our God(s).

With regards to government and politics, pacifism rules the actions of a Shaker, but complacency does not. They are an outspoken bunch, clear with regards to their boundaries.

Self-protective due to their history of persecution the Shakers are self-sufficient, inventive and creative. Communal living, separated by gender, is the norm. Dedication to art, music and living off the land – seeking nourishment and healing from free-range livestock, local agriculture for food, and healing from the medicinal use of herbs are also principals with which I resonated. The goals to re-harmonize and re-unite with the sacred is also prevalent in both Neo-Pagan and Shaker practices.

Granted, I was also curious about their use of trance since the religious movement comes from the roots of a small evangelical British sect dubbed the “shaking Quakers”. The name was popularized due to the utilization of dance and ecstatic visionary experiences as part of worship. And it is, perhaps, this element of their history that has solicited the greatest amount of falsehood, mystery and myth over the centuries.

Based on totally unsubstantiated rumor, I expected the worship experience I attended to be about as animated as a southern Pentecostal revival—complete with speaking in tongues, bodies falling to the floor and flailing limbs. It is with some shame in hindsight that I confess that to be safe and decrease my risk of injury, on the day I attended Meeting (their name for Sunday Service) I carefully chose my wardrobe, wore flat heeled shoes (for a quick getaway if needed) and carried a light purse (in case a person, possessed by Spirit, were to get a hold of it.)

I laugh now at how crazy my assumptions were.

Interview with Brother Arnold on behalf of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village Community. At the time of my visit, there were three active female and one active male Shaker, Brother Arnold.

Question: How did you come to be a part of the community?

Brother Arnold: I was brought up in Massachusetts and knew about the Shakers all of my life. When I was 16 I wrote to the Community with questions about Shakerism in the 20th century because I could not locate any information. After a two-year correspondence, I finally made a visit in November of 1974.

I visited for three years before I was in a spirit to realize that this is where I felt called to be.

Question: Due to celibacy, I assume that there is a self-selection process that takes place in order for adults to become part of the community. Can you give me some examples of how this has manifested?

Brother Arnold: Anyone who comes to join has to feel an inner prompting of the Spirit calling them to this particular faith and life. Everyone experiences faith and calling differently, but in the end the call and the answering of the person to that call comes down to the same thing -- to put our faith into action.

Question: Can you share some before and after scenarios, to clarify the

Was the Meeting theatrical? No; Magical? Yes.

According to information found in the “Encyclopedia of American Religious History”, the Shakers are best known today for the austere architectural style of their villages and the manufacture of furniture. They have been inventors and innovators at the forefront of various technologies as well as design.

In the early 19th century there were 19 active Shaker communities spread over 1,500 miles, from Maine to Indiana to Florida. At the peak of activity in the 1840s, there were between 5,000 to 6,000 community members and then the numbers began to decline slowly after the 1850s. Those attracted to the lifestyle were typically people seeking spiritual simplicity as well as those disillusioned with economics and social issues of the day, single mothers with children, widows, widowers, and orphans.

Presently, Shaker villages exist as mere tourist attractions dedicated to historic preservation and commerce – with the exception of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker community in New Gloucester, Maine. Sabbathday Lake is the only place a person can go to actually chat, work side-by-side, worship with and learn from actual people who are living and practicing Shakers.

As an official religion, Shakerism was officially formed as communities only after the death of founder Ann Lee (also known as Mother Ann) in 1784.

Born in 1736, Lee, a native of Manchester England, was a bright, active child who had six siblings. As she grew older, she begged to be saved from the repugnance of marriage but was forced to give in to cultural norms of the day. She gave birth to four children but they all died. While growing up she often had visions of angels. She was spiritually sensitive to various energies and well aware of the “depravity of human nature”.

The book “Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message” published in 1905 and written by Anna White and Leila S. Taylor of the North Family of Shakers in Mount Lebanon New York reveals the character of Ann Lee:

“Always has it been true that a great religious movement has started with one person. About this humble, unlettered woman centered some of the most remarkable spiritual phenomena the world has seen – electric streams from Diety using her as transmitter of spiritual force....Too healthy for hysteria, too well balanced for insanity, too practical for visionary or self-deceiving egotist, too real and well attested in all her manifestations of power, for hypocrisy.”

Ann Lee channeled. People listened. She received a series of revelations that disclosed

many things, including that God was bipartiate (equal of both Father and Mother) and that sexual intercourse was the source of human sinfulness.

In an era when women were not allowed anywhere near a pulpit and when women's lives were essentially destined to be dedicated to the slavery of home keeping, pregnancy, childrearing and husband tending – one can understand why Lee and her small group of followers came to the United States. It was for the same reason most of our ancestors did; they were dubbed as heretics in their respective communities and sought to flee to the new world to escape from a life of religious persecution and poverty.

Incidentally, from 1837 to 1847, during a spiritual revival period of the faith, believers even affirmed that Mother Ann Lee had been the second coming of Christ.

Given their rejection of procreation as a means of increasing the size of the Society, the Shaker movement has endured longevity, when other religions have failed. For more than a decade, there has been only a hand full of Shakers in America but that has never been a point of discouragement. As part of the divine revelations shared with Mother Ann, this was to be expected during a period taking place prior to a resurgence of those who would be drawn to the Shaker lifestyle.

Considering current political unrest, the economy forcing people to reassess priorities, the growth of interest in religions that honor the earth, desire for simplicity and self-sufficiency, and the multitude of

transformations that have taken place?

Brother Arnold: We all come from different places, families and experiences. But, what binds us all together is the faith we share. We are called to help build that unity of Spirit within our Community.

We are called to a daily transformation in dying to our old selves and being born anew in the spirit.

Question: What do you feel is the biggest misconception that people have about Shakers?

Brother Arnold: That there are no longer any Shakers.

Question: What do you want people to know about Shakers?

Brother Arnold: That we are an active and open Community and that we are seeking to live out the Christ life on a daily basis

Question: As part of public worship, do the Shakers still shake?

Brother Arnold: You saw for yourself that we do not. Shaking has not be a part of our life since 1800. The dances and marches that superceded the shaking have also be put aside since around 1900.

Question: In that case, is shaking something that takes place outside of public view, such as in private when community

religious sects outwardly attesting to concepts of Masculine/Feminine divinity, I'm led to believe that a Shaker renaissance indeed will be on the way soon.

Icing on the cake comes from the fact that single mothers with children are historically those who have benefited most significantly from the Shaker lifestyle. According to Washing Times Religion Editor Julia Duin's book "Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About it" unmarried women with children – statistically the largest number of mothers in America -- have not been finding spiritual nourishment, or community support in churches and have been quitting those traditional establishments in high numbers for quite some time.

Despite the waxing and waning of membership, the Encyclopedia of American Religious History calls the Shaker movement "the longest-lived communitarian experiment in American history".

Wanting to document something that was authentic and not touristy with regards to my visit to the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, I asked permission to attend a Shaker Meeting in order to write about my experience for publication. It is normal protocol to ask permission for such things.

I was not allowed to take notes, photographs or make any type of recording in the Meeting House. Fortunately, I got a good parking spot and had a tape recorder prepped in order to dictate the experience while it was fresh in my mind.

Here is what happened on a warm fall day late last year:

I entered into the meetinghouse about 9:55 AM through a door on the right hand side of the building. I noticed that a couple ahead of me had split – the woman entering on the right and the man that was in the car with her – had walked in through a door to the left.

When I got inside, I saw why. Rows of bench style pews were arranged to face the center of the room - 10 women were seated on the right side of the building. Four men were seated on the left.

The wooden benches contained copies of the Shaker Hymnal, filled with lyrics and simple notation for singing. Shaker music is sung acappella, without instrumental accompaniment. Dividing the rows of benches was a lectern, used to hold the Bible for reading aloud. There was no artwork on the walls and no stained glass. As far as I could tell, there was no electricity in the room either. The clear glass windows were open slightly to let in a breeze, also reveal waving sunflowers, an orchard and garden area. The rafters and parts of the walls were painted Shaker blue – a durable, organic paint combination of blueberries and milk. (I would later learn that the paint job was more

than a century old.)

A couple moments after 10 AM a man dressed in black with a crisp white shirt struck a large bell outside the meetinghouse three times. He entered in through the left and shut the door behind him.

After some time of silence, he opened his mouth and said a few words.

Unfortunately I do not remember those words.

I was trying to stop myself from giggling. Instead of listening, I was biting my lip very, very hard to keep from being inappropriate.

The gentleman, in his late 40s or early 50s in age, strongly reminded me of actor Paul Reubens, of Pee Wee Herman fame. It was something about the suit, his lean physique, the way the sunlight was hitting his face and hands, his facial structure and the way he positioned his jaw when he spoke. (I would later discover that the man was Brother Arnold.) Nevertheless, it took me a few minutes to gain composure and to quit expecting him to finish sentences with lines from "Pee Wee's Big Adventure".

A song was sung at this point and that we were given the hymnal page number as reference. It would be the only time that we were given page numbers during the hour long service. Twelve songs were sung, but somehow we all knew the words – even a first time visitor like me – without checking the hymnal again. I'd never heard those songs before, but somehow, I knew them.

members are either alone or separated by gender?

Brother Arnold: Nay that is not a gift that has been present for generations.

Question: Was shaking considered part of transmission of "gifts" from God?

Brother Arnold: Shaking was never a way to transmit a gift. It was a gift to the individual and an act of physically shaking out those things that God cannot own or bless. The term "gift" for a Believer is indeed all encompassing. A gift is literally anything that we might receive from God.

Question: What are some of the "gifts" that have been received?

Brother Arnold: The setting up of the Communities, worship patterns, songs, etc. There are an abundance of gifts that have helped to mold and to change our communal life.

Question: What are gifts that have begun in the Shaker Community and rippled out into mass consciousness?

Brother Arnold: There are a lot of Shaker inventions -- including, but certainly not limited to, the flat broom, pen nib, circular saw and automatic washing machine.

The service revolved around reading and sharing. The Bible readings were read aloud by individual Shakers, a different person taking a particular chapter and verse section from each book. The Old Testament from the Book of Jeremiah, New Testament from the Book of James, and Gospel from St. Luke. There was no hell, fire and brimstone. It was all about love, learning, responsibility and gratitude.

The Shaker women were dressed in traditional Sunday Shaker attire— simple, colorful and modest dresses. Two women were mature, at least in their late 60s and another who appeared to be in her late teens or early twenties. The younger Shaker woman had light brown kinky, curly hair pulled up into a bun on top of her head, lots of barrettes holding her hair in place, no makeup and wore glasses.

Sister Francis, the eldest woman Shaker, who incidentally was on oxygen but filled with a vivacious, contagious exuberance, took the lead to head into the sermon. If one were to type the word “Filled with the Presence” into Google, I’m sure Sister Francis would appear. There’s just no other way to describe her aura.

She shared a tinge of her history, and that she’d been raised Catholic but now practiced the Shaker faith and tradition. “One aspect I appreciated about Catholicism,” Sister Francis shared, “was that you have confession of sins on a Saturday before attending service on a Sunday.”

Being a Shaker and in the safety of the meetinghouse, it is customary to profess sin and ask forgiveness (help in overcoming the sin) before sharing the message that you have been given (or gifted for yourself and the benefit of others) to share.

That shared, she said that everyone was encouraged to participate and the topic of discussion was to be the Biblical lessons that had been read.

Sister Francis stated that each person is a “mini-Christ”. God dwells within each of us and therefore if someone is talking to you it is “the voice of God” talking to you.

Certainly, that could be seen as a statement of blasphemy – great blasphemy, in certain parts of the country. But the thoughts that popped into my head at that moment were, “Wow! I’m really liking this place...”

What happened after that moment astonished me and I still get choked up thinking about the experience, despite the time that has passed.

The typical Judeo-Christian clergy prepares in advance for a sermon. The typical witch prepares in advance for Sabbats and Esbats – what will be said, what will be done, who will do what.

But, the sermon held at the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village Meeting House was extemporaneous.

Sister Francis took the lead, confessing a sin of what some would probably deem a part of the natural character and personality she has that makes her loveable. She asked for divine help and then she spoke a message greater than herself. She sat down. Then we all sang a song based on part of what she had to share.

For each person that stood, one by one, speaking, sharing and then sitting, the message was followed with song. Some songs would be thematic based on the overall message; other songs would have direct lines from the message shared – as if the person had just read lyrics from a popular radio tune.

There was not a single main authority figure. The Divinity of each person was honored.

We were a room full of strangers. We didn't know what each other were going to say, but slight body movements indicated who would be next to stand. And the messages and what was said weaved beautifully together – like a tapestry of union. There was naturalness, an organic process taking place. What would have normally been chaos, revealed itself as order.

Words started to be given to me to speak on a few occasions, but then they dissipated, as another person stood up.

At some point, I stood. I don't remember standing. I don't remember my legs making the clenching movement they normally do before I arise. It just seemed like the top of my body lifted out of the seat and next thing I knew, words were coming out of my mouth about lepers, gratitude and looking at things with new eyes.

The words given to me to share indicated that looking at things with old eyes meant hanging onto limitations of past experiences and not being open to transformation. Only by being in a place of gratitude could a shift take place in order to look at things with new eyes.

As I spoke, a visual of my dog licking a wound on his arm kept popping into my mind. The last words I spoke before sitting down and singing another song that I didn't know was: "In the same way that the use of our tongues can hurt, they also have the ability to heal and soothe wounds."

My fanny plopped back down on the bench. I don't remember bending my legs.

More people spoke. One man shared that “Complacency was a sin” and that he was drawn to take action about a manner, which he’d not taken a stance previously. One woman cried in outrage revealing her pain and anger at Christians. She asked aloud for help to forgive those who had taught her so much hatred in the traditional Christian tradition in which she had been raised.

One woman talked about driving in a car through heavy rains that followed a hurricane and how it made her feel cleansed in a way that was refreshing to her whole being. She had at one time been a regular at the Sabbathday Lake meetings, but now lived out of the country and had made a special drive that day to experience a Sunday meeting once again. “The winds coming through the windows here stir something within me,” she shared.

Everyone that spoke took ownership for their feelings. Some of the larger picture messages were metaphysical. References to life circumstances mirroring back to us based on consciousness were mentioned on more than one occasion.

In all, the extemporaneous sermon consisted of contributions from 4 men and 7 women.

There was no collection of an offering. And something about the lack of pomp and circumstance and the simplicity of the situation allowed for a natural ebb and flow of activity and action that is something that I know I’ve never been exposed to before in any traditional religious setting.

After the service was over, many of us in attendance chatted briefly in the parking lot. It was humorous. Each of us had made assumptions about the other, and laughed to discover that none of us were old timers.

Apparently we were all just a group of strangers brought together for a magical morning that was quite moving for us all.

It is a great gift to share sacred space with those in our belief.

In some ways it is even a greater gift to be able to do the same with those with whom we have differences, but can find common ground in which to learn as well as share love, honor and respect.

To plan your visit:

Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village

www.shaker.lib.me.us

707 Shaker Rd.

New Gloucester, ME 04260

(207) 926-4597

The village, an agricultural as well as a spiritually based attraction, features a museum, store and arts and crafts gallery. Check the calendar for various workshops, demonstrations, and special events.

Maine Office of Tourism

www.visitmaine.com

Greater Portland Casco Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.visitportland.com

Rich with 19th century architecture and offering a wide variety of things to do if on foot, Portland and the Casco Bay area is a fun, friendly area that combines lobster, lighthouses, diverse shopping, dining, lodging and nightlife options. Sabbathday Lake is located about 25 minutes north west of Portland Maine – between the picturesque coastal peninsula and rugged mountains terrain.

Poland Springs Resort and Inn

www.polandspringinns.com

The nation's first golf resort, Poland Springs Resort and Inn provides the closest proximity to overnight lodging for people visiting the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village. It's value priced to attract families, retirees and students. Nice walking trails, historic, beautiful scenery, and overall a quirky tourist attraction merging kitsch with class. Definitely worth a visit because there is something for everyone, particularly those interested in the history and lore related to the Poland Springs water business. But those sensitive to cigarette smoke, blue haired ladies, and all you can eat country style buffet's will probably be much more comfortable trekking into Portland for accommodations and a greater diversity of nightlife instead.



Above: Ringing of this bell on Sunday mornings denotes the start of a Shaker Meeting service.

Below: Sheep graze peacefully in their pastoral setting at the Shaker Village.





Above: Although it is not marked, the Shaker Meeting house has two doors which serve as gender specific entrances for service. The one on the right is for women, on the left is for men.

Below: Wooden pegs line the walls at about eye level and serve as hooks for hats, clothing and other items that need to be kept off the floor. Simplicity and practicality





Above: While most churches obscure the outdoors via stained glass, the windows in the Shaker Meeting House are clear to reveal nature's majesty as well as lush herb, flower and vegetable gardens.

CONJURE IN THE SOUTH

by Gar Pickering aka Papa Toad Bone

The Old Southern Cunja

There are many images that course through the mind when one hears mention of the Deep South. Some will imagine some of the darkest sides, a burning cross and lynching's. Some will imagine the romantic sides, share croppers shacks and antebellum mansions. When one thinks of the spiritual ways in the south, most imagine either white painted churches out in the country, filled with good old folks taken by the Holy Ghost, or New Orleans Voodoo. The real Deep South is somewhere between these extremes.

The South is by far one of the most romanticized parts of the country. There is a certain mystic to the deep swamps full with gators, with Spanish moss swaying in the breeze,

and the dusty midnight crossroads full of devils. But, the most beautiful part of the south is the blending of so many cultures that made it what it is. Europeans, Natives and Africans all lived here together, and our cultures all came together. This mixture can be seen in language, music, food, and my favorite, sorcery.

The folk magic of the Deep South is commonly called Hoodoo, or sometimes just conjure. Conjure can mean anything from reciting Psalms over a candle, to going to the crossroads to meet the Ole Black Man. Most folks do not think themselves as doing conjure, that is the vocation of the root worker. Just like in the olden days, most everyone knows a few tricks to do for their needs, but leave most of it up to the professional, who they hire to do their business for them. Not everyone has that calling to do what the root worker does.

Hoodoo is a mixture of the three distinct culture mentioned earlier. Much of the lore and praxis is based on a Germanic system, by way of Pow Wow's...take that, and throw in a heavy African magic system, and mix it up with Native American herbal lore, and you have Hoodoo. If you have ever read the tale of John the Conqueror, a black man, wanting the devil's daughter, accomplishing three tasks, and fleeing away with the devil in pursuit, you will get an idea of how this mixture works.

Much of the workings of conjure involve roots, minerals, herbs and animal parts, much like the workings of the Old World witch would have been. Some of the more commonly used "curios" are things such as Devil's Shoestrings, Dixie John root, Brimstone, Alligator feet, black hen eggs, Crawfish dust, dirt dauber dirt and red brick dust. Every day things are used as well, such as silver dimes, railroad spikes, poker chips, baking soda boxes, bourbon and match heads. It is very down home, and can be practiced by taking a walk around your home and surrounding woods, collecting finds.

Hoodoo brings no religious dogma, and it has no worldview of its own. It is magic for the sake of magic. It is practical. Finding a lover, getting a job, and getting annoying neighbors to leave. Many of the more traditional root workers are actually Christian, and even more of the clients who seek them out are. If one were to take a proper elder worldview, and apply that wisdom to the Hoodoo way, a wonderful system of old world sorcery would be in their hands.

The Mojo Hand as the Well

One of the main charms one comes across in conjure is the Mojo Hand, or gris gris. This is, traditionally, a red flannel bag filled with the many things that the root worker selects to lend its power in sympathy to the working. In essence, the Mojo bag is a portable representation of the Well of Wyrð. A place to plant the seeds of the outcome you will. When one lays out the many parts that will go in to the hand, consecrates

them, and inserts them into the bag, they have placed a deed into the unseen, where it will stay until it manifests out in to the world of the suns light. After all of the seeds are planted in the unseen, it is stitched closed and fed oils to aide the working, and sometimes sealed with the makers blood. The hand is kept in close proximity to its owner. If it is handled by another, it can negate the work, or in the hands of another conjure worker, can be used against them. Folks are very protective of their Mojo Bag. The bag is only opened to replace herbs or add new things, but never just for the sake of looking at its contents.

Other aspects of Hoodoo are easily recognized from European systems, such as the Witches Bottle and the use of the days to aid the working. Many time their workings by moon phase, or by the time of year. One of my favorite ways to reckon sorcerous timing is by use of the clock face, something I have only seen in Hoodoo. It works by using the clocks face as a microcosm of wax and wane, like the moon and the seasons. When the hands of the clock are both in accent, it is treated like the waxing moon. As the hands are both on the decent, it is treated as the waning moon. Works done during a time where one ascends and one descends can be confused, and fail. The most famous time to work conjure is the hour of 11:30 pm to 12:30 am. That way, workings of both natures can be done in one hour, as illustrated in the movie *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

Though also used in European sorcery, foot track working is one of the biggest African influences to Southern conjure. Laying tricks for the feet is one of the most common uses of the many dusts employed. Some of these dusts, to name a few, are Hot Foot Powder, Crossing Dust, and Goofer Dust. The catching of ones foot print, and mixing it with a dust and laying out a pattern for one to step in/over is how these tricks are delivered. There are ways one protects the feet as well, such as salt and pepper in their shoes, or wearing a Mercury dime about their ankle. I have seen a photo from the 1920's of an old black woman from the delta showing off her silver dime anklet.

Conjure has always had a home in the South, and never suffered the persecution of the Puritans of New England. It was hidden safely away out in the country, among people both black and white. Today, though more commonly still accepted in the black community, it can still be found in certain parts of the South. Take a trip to the coast of Georgia, the Mississippi Delta, or the coastal parishes of Louisiana, and you will see it alive and well, as it shall remain.

About the author:

Gar Pickering, aka Papa Toad Bone, is a south Mississippi native and conjure worker. First exposed to Hoodoo and witchcraft as a teen in the French Quarter, he has spent his adult life in study of heathenry, witchcraft and folk magic practices of the Old World and New. In summer 2008, he unveiled Toad's Bone Apotheca, a local private shop for

those who practice, and seek the services of a root worker. He travels south Mississippi with an antique trunk full of roots, minerals, waters, and various other dead and dried things, offering advice on conditions, while helping and teaching people to lay their own tricks. Email him at toadsbone@yahoo.com, or visit www.toadsbone.com.

Further Reading:

HOODOO IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: an online book by Catherine Yronwode

<http://www.luckymojo.com/hoodoo.html>

HOODOO, CONJURATION, WITCHCRAFT, ROOTWORK by Harry M. Hyatt

POW-WOWS: OR, LONG LOST FRIEND by John George Hoffman



ANCESTORS AND SACRED SPACE

Peter Paddon

From The Crooked Path: Transcripts of a Pagan Podcast. This Excerpt transcribed by Steven Rose.

Sacred space means different things to different people. So really, the only way I get around that is to tell you what it means to me. Sacred space is an enclosure we create, if you like, an artificial bubble in mundane reality, inside which we create an environment that is conducive to whatever type of ritual work or crafting work we plan on doing.

Now there's a lot of different methods in different traditions for creating sacred space, and a lot of different names too. For the average Neopagan Wiccan, circle casting is the term that springs to mind. But circle casting is not exactly what the Traditional Witch or Cunningfolk or Traditional Crafter would call the setting up of their sacred space. The reason for this is that Crafters are not likely to use terms that have been borrowed from other places. You see, circle casting is technically a ceremonial magic technique, and as Wicca borrowed quite a lot of its ritual structure from ceremonial magic, from the Golden Dawn courtesy of Gerald Gardner, and even more so from Alex Sanders - he got even more ceremonial than Gerald did - and so the circle casting that you have in most Wiccan covens is very ceremonial-oriented.

It uses the classical elements, all the watch towers as they're often called. And even the phrase that is used when drawing the circle in Gardnerian and Alexandrian circles at least, is taken straight out of the Key of Solomon:

"I conjure thee, o circle of power, that thou be'est a boundary between the world of men and the realms of the mighty ones - a guardian and protection that shall preserve and contain the power that I shall raise within thee. Wherefore do I bless thee in the names of the Lord and Lady"

So, it's very much about creating a barrier, a boundary within which you can work. And perhaps the most significant difference from the point of view of a Crafter between the ceremonial or Wiccan circle and the sacred space created by non-Wiccan methods is that in a Wiccan circle, in a ceremonial circle the aim is to set up an environment and then bring everything you need into that environment, you call upon your deities and bring them into the circle with you, drawing down the Moon, drawing down the Sun, invoking, bringing things in. And this is very much the *modus operandi* of the ceremonial magician: they stay put and everything comes to them.

In traditional crafting, it actually works the other way around. The space is created, or set aside if you like, and then the crafter takes the space and themselves to where ever it is the entities or energies that they want to work with happen to be. So, there's a definite difference in feel, if nothing else. There's also a difference in names. Most traditional crafters try to avoid saying "casting circle" unless they really have to, just because they want to emphasize the fact that it's different from what a Wiccan does. Names that you might find being used for creating sacred space are warding the space, laying a compass, plowing the bloody acre, raising the hedgerow, lot's of different terms like that, which tend to be very physical-sounding descriptive terms.

And each of them has a particular technique associated with it. Some are use predominantly by a particular tradition, and some are more generic. Warding the space is probably the most generic term, covering all the techniques for doing this. It can just involve - and there are traditional crafters that are going to hate me saying this - casting a circle by another name. It is making the space in which you're standing something special, set aside from the mundane world.

Laying a Compass is a little bit more technical than just warding space, because what you're aiming to do when you lay a compass is to set out the lie of the land, which is a very old fashioned sort of phrase. But it involves basically setting out things that are specific to your tradition and establishing their relationship to each other within the space and placing yourself in the center or fulcrum point so that you're able to bring about the changes that you want. This takes a little bit of practice, and is not something you can learn from a book. It's something you really have to either get a light bulb moment with, or have somebody whose skilled at it work you through the process.

Like most traditional crafting techniques, it's all very experiential. You have to actually learn it hands on. So I'm not going to try to explain it in detail here, except basically what you're trying to do is you're trying to superimpose your Tradition's map of the universe upon the land upon which you're working.

Plowing the bloody acre is more of an outdoor term. It's often the traditional image of dragging your left leg or your right leg, usually left leg, as you work your way around the perimeter of the circle space to establish a boundary marker. The bloody acre is the land that is covered by the River of Blood, which is a nice technical term used in fairy faith as well as several other old Crafting Traditions that means, essentially, the current of magic or crafting that the person or persons is part of. And so you're talking about immersing yourself in the Current, in the Tradition itself, and plowing, working the land quite literally, and making the two one and the same, because all Traditions, all Currents come out of the Land in one form or another, because they're tied into the ancestors.

So do we do this indoors or outdoors? Well, as I was taught, if you can't work your magic stark naked in a concrete bunker, then you can't work magic period, so ultimately it doesn't matter. But obviously sometimes you're going to be working indoors and sometimes you're going to be working outdoors. Does the technique change? Yes it does, mainly because Traditional Crafters tend to see all of the land as sacred in greater or lesser extent, so you don't really need to make the land sacred. It already is. So you just basically set up your boundary markers and you work and usually at the end of it, rather than taking it all down again, you just walk away from it, because you're not going to "desacredize" the land any more than you're going to make it more sacred than it started out to be.

Indoors is a different matter. If you work in a temple, then you're going to build up a similar sort of effect over the years in your temple space as well, but if you have to use the living room or a corner of your bedroom, then you're basically going to put it up and take it down each time as completely as you can, so that you don't have any issues with using that space for mundane purposes at other times. So that's basically the bare nuts and bolts of sacred space. Of course, once you're in sacred space and you've got it established, there's a whole world of topics we can discuss on what you can do when you're in there. But we'll save that for another time.

And so, we're on to Ancestors. So, who am I talking about when I refer to Ancestors? Obviously, the thing that springs to mind is grandma and grandpa and all of their kith and kin, but, hopefully we're going back a little further than that. "Ancestors" is a word that get thrown around a lot, and I don't know if everybody really sits and thinks about what they mean when they say it. We're obviously not just talking about grandparents, great grandparents and aunts and uncles and so on and so forth when we're talking about Ancestors. We're going back a little further than that and referring to the pre-Christian ancestors who did the sort of things that we're hoping to reconstruct, recreate, recover, whatever phrase you want to use for it. It really is meant to mean your blood ancestors, but in practice we're talking about the ancestors of our race or our species. We tend to cast the net a little wider.

We'll take anybody from "way back when" who has a nugget of lore or information that they want to share with us. So, we're really not that proud when it comes to stuff like that - we'll take it from anywhere. Ancestors are generally very important parts of traditional crafting. Probably one of the biggest things that differentiates Traditional Craft from Wicca is the focus on ancestral workings. Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca do have ancestral workings, but they're not as well known or as obvious to most people. But they do exist.

Ancestral work within the traditional crafting community, if you can call it a community, a bunch of ornery individuals so I don't know if the word community applies here, but

ancestors play a very important part in both the wheel of the year, rites of the year, and also the personal crafting of a traditional crafter. So it's important to get your bearings where the ancestors are concerned. Really, they are a very key component of most rituals and of the current of the Tradition in general.

Obviously, they're seen in some mythic sense as being the progenitors of the tradition, and probably one of the most obvious signs of ancestral working in a coven or group will be there'll be some sort of stone and probably some sort of representation of a skull upon the altar at some point. On our altar we have a large hearth stone, and we have a pewter skull with Celtic markings sitting on top of that to represent our ancestors. I should point out at this point that the use of an altar itself is almost considered blasphemy in some traditional crafting circles. We happen to have a table that I made specially for the purpose of putting stuff on when we're working ritual. So technically, it's an altar. But it's more of a work table than place of worship. We don't do any bowing of the head and that sort of stuff there, at least, not when anyone's looking.

We call upon the ancestors every time we lay the compass. So they're an integral part of the compass. They define the shape and the texture of the crafting we do, and they're largely responsible for channeling the energies for us. We do everything indirectly through the ancestors to a certain extent, and of course the river of blood, the current of the tradition is made up from the memories and the energies of our ancestors.

An obvious way that we use our ancestral connections is in the technique of tapping the bone, or rather the series of techniques that come under the heading of tapping the bone. Tapping the bone is literally getting information from the ancestors, and trying to awaken some of those memories that lie dormant in our genes, in our cellular structure, in our blood and bone if you like. There are several techniques for doing this, from working literally with a piece of human bone - which is probably not as popular today as it used to be in olden times, when cunning crafters would carry a human knuckle bone as a pendant around their necks to use for meditating. They would even scrape some pieces of it into their tea to promote vision quests and such like.

But nowadays, there's all sorts of reasons why we probably wouldn't do that. However, the metaphorical link, the link that we have with the bone of our ancestors though symbols rather than literal bone can be just as strong, and we will obviously work with the skull upon our altar predominantly for this sort of thing.

Tapping the bone can literally be taking the wand and tapping on the top of a skull as part of a working. We often tap it on the altar or table three times, and we tend to work with the skull by enfleshing it. We breathe life force into it and call in one or more particular ancestors to work with. We may not actually get the lore or whatever

it is we're after directly from them, but they act as a herald if you like or a guide, a doorman bringing whatever is necessary so that we can do what we need to do.

That may take the form of calling upon the energy of the Ancestors to assist us in a working or calling upon the memories, the ancestral memories themselves to try and recover some lore on how to do something in a particular way, which is actually a lot of fun, although it can be a little daunting because you have to really let go the concept of making a fool of yourself because you never know where it's going to take you when you do that sort of working.

Recovering the lore is very important. Obviously, despite many grand claims to the contrary, you're not going to find an unbroken chain of Pagan practice stretching back from the modern day right through to pre-Christian Britain. You may find fragments here and there. You may find families that have kept some sort of esoteric practice going without really calling it Pagan or being Pagan in any way. And that's fine, that's cool, as long as it doesn't get misrepresented being grander than it is. But you can take these pieces, these fragments that you can find out from research and from reading and studying and talking to people, and from working with people who've done that sort of thing, and picking up some hints and tips from them.

Then you can take that to the Ancestors themselves and work on filling in the gaps, recovering the lost lore, which is what a lot of people do. We tend to reconstruct our traditions rather than inherit them these days. That doesn't make them any less valid, and it certainly doesn't make them any less potent, but acknowledging that fact does make them a lot more honest. And I think that's a very important thing. Even where you do have somebody who has any sort of valid claim of stuff being handed down through generations however long, even they are generally in the situation where they are going to be recovering lore through tapping the bone in some way or another.

One of the really interesting things is that of course in ritual space the aim is to step outside of time for a while. When you're not in the mundane realm, you're really in the eternal now where past, present, and future meet, and so, one of the concepts that people find a little difficult to grasp, but it actually makes perfect sense when you think about it - although most people try not to - is that the ancestors aren't just the people who are from the past. We often refer to ancestors as "ancestors past and ancestors yet to be". Those who come after us are also our ancestors, and you have to sort it out.

It helps to not be thinking in too linear a fashion when you start talking about stuff like that. Luckily when we're in the middle of one of our rituals, being linear is generally the hardest thing to do. So you can actually fall into that eternal nowness, the eternal state of becoming, which is so potent and powerful when it comes to working any sort of magic.

Of course, in any talk about ancestors, you really can't leave out the oldest of ancestors. Many shamanic traditions and the traditional crafting traditions of the British Isles are no exception here. They think of the gods themselves as being the most ancient ancestors. They see us humans as being part of that continuous line between the gods and modern man. And that's why we always consider that we're all sacred and we all have a divine spark within us. After all, there has to be something of worth within us. Otherwise, why would the ancestors talk to us? Anyway, that's it for today. I hope you enjoyed this. And I hope you'll tune in for future editions of the Crooked Path.

BECOMING A TRADITIONAL WITCH: THE JOURNEY TO A VERY OLD WAY OF LIVING AND CRAFTING

By Robin Artisson

What It Means To Belong

People sometimes ask me what they need to do to become a "Traditional Witch". Unfortunately, It's not really possible to answer such questions in a simple, objective, or universal way. There are many kinds of *witchcraft* that are "traditional"- witchcraft is, after all, a widespread phenomenon, very broad in scope and detail. I can, however, answer them from my own perspective- and from the perspective of the great people I have known who have called themselves "witches"- sorcerers and women of Art who stayed close to the ground and even closer to an uncommon sort of wisdom and cunning that even today, long after my experiences with them, keeps me in awe.

Before I can begin to lay out some guidance towards the path of Traditional Witchcraft as I understand it, I need to discuss the notion of *belonging*- and I will do so by discussing what it means to belong to a religion- even though Traditional Witchcraft doesn't necessarily have to be someone's "religion". I chose *religion* because it is a force that touches most lives in an extraordinary way, and many understand it well enough.

You can look at my criteria of "belonging" with regard to any organized way of thinking or being that includes people other than yourself within its boundaries. To "belong to a religion", you must consent to its *labels*, *titles*, and *participate in its traditional activities* or characteristic patterns of ritual or behavior. You must consent even further to *let yourself see the world* in the way the religion requires- you embrace its beliefs and its worldview.

If (for instance) you call yourself "Wiccan", participate in Wiccan rituals on a regular or semi-regular basis, and see the world in the particularly Wiccan way, (you have a belief that all gods are one god, in the threefold law, etc.) Then you are Wiccan. The very same measures would indicate who is Catholic, or Buddhist, Muslim, or any religion.

Now, before I can continue on to the topic of Traditional Witchcraft, I must talk about *Traditional Paganism*- and I use this as a very general, inclusive term.

A Wiccan ceases to be Wiccan when they cease doing these things I mention above. They religiously become a *Traditional Pagan* when they begin calling themselves so, either by embracing- as a descriptive label- the basic term “Traditional Pagan” or any of its more specific branches (such as Asatru or others); when they take part in some form of Traditional Pagan ritual-practice (which can be very minimalist) and when they *see the world as Traditional Pagans see it*.

The Bare Bones of the Traditional Pagan Worldview

The “general” Traditional Pagan worldview is simple, indeed; it says, very basically, that:

The **Land under our feet** and all around us is the presence of a most sacred, living reality;

That we and all other forms of life, seen or unseen, are in a **timeless and eternal web-work** of sacred powers that all interact with one another and all depend on one another;

That the Underworld- a timeless and mysterious “region” of spiritual powers, itself the constant source of life, mysterious experiences, and numinal forces, is “beneath” the land but also *within* all things, and that all beings who die arise later in the Underworld as spirits or strangely existing entities- though certainly not all of them become desirable, nice entities. These “hidden beings” or hidden folk go on interacting with us in many strange ways through the medium of the Land itself- for the Land is a gateway to the unseen;

Lastly, “Traditional Pagans” will often feel connected to a place on the land through which they experience the sacred, become attached to that place and assume the roles of guardians of it. They try to stay warm and close to it. This is a common tendency, and an ancient one.

Traditional Pagans don’t have a formulaic view of ethics and morality; it is more diffuse and open to situational necessity. They will do what they have to do to keep their families safe and their land safe. They will reverence life, reverence the memory of the dead, and try to stay well while respecting the needs of others, so long as those others return the respect. That’s about it, as far as I’ve seen. Any other moral or ethical rules or imperatives are embraced by the individual, or discarded by them; those are personal

choices. But all choices have an impact on this world and in the unseen world, and a person goes to the Underworld to face the good and bad consequences of their choices in this world.

“Reincarnation” is best left for Eastern religions and new-agers, however a very ancient notion of “rebirth” does seem to exist at the bottom of the true “Old Ways” of ancient Europe- though this native idea is a vision of a soul’s “cycle” through many conditions and forms of life, both in the unseen world and the world that is seen. We are all passing through many conditions of life, even since our own births, and this notion can be logically extended beyond the grave- death is not a “severing away” from life, but an alteration of life and re-integration into life’s web in many new ways. Rebirth isn’t about “floating into a new body”; it is about the mythical activity of *shape-shifting*.

A person can, pursuant to many old teachings and beliefs from many places, become a spirit or even an animal due to their own rebirth cycle; perhaps, if Fate weaves it so, they can “re-become” another person- but such is the nature of life’s flow, the “new” person isn’t the same as the last. Each form of life is unique in the moment in which it exists. Yet, a mysterious connection exists between all things, and even across what we call “time.” These mysteries could give a person much to think on- maybe even a lifetime’s worth of thinking. And that would not be a wasted life! But thinking is not itself enough: we need *experiencing*, too- searching and doing.

To become wise enough to consciously begin to shape one’s own “cycle of rebirths” - that would be a good goal. Perhaps to become wise enough to transform the unconscious compulsions that rule our daily lives, and invade our dreams- that might be a better goal. But enough on that now.

Traditional Pagans will reverence the land in private ways, and attempt to become “seers” of how the hidden powers of a place manifest at any given time. Becoming such a seer and honoring those powers and their appearances is really the heart of “traditional” ritual. “Sacred seasons”, or sabbats, or the hidden seasons- these things vary from place to place. One thing is certain- some days are doors. Some weeks or months or seasons are doorways to a deeper experience of the land and the self, as well as the broader community of life. There is no easy “calendar” round for these doorway-days; one must discover them. Some are very well known from the Isles and Europe generally- Beltaine, Midsummer, Samhain, etc; others are less well known. Every Traditional Pagan will, following along with their land, adhere to their own inner and outer calendrical journey.

If one feels drawn to worship “Gods” - and indeed, traditional pagans from the distant past did call many of the other living powers in this web of life “Gods”- then they must be either discovered through the inner exploration of the Land and the self, or one must answer a deep call from within the heart which inclines one towards certain

pantheons from the past. From that point, one must build a ritual life that takes these old living powers and their myths into its heart.

But one doesn't require "Gods" in their life in some formal, constructed way; the simple, vast, and timeless power of the Land and all things- called by me the "Weird"- is really enough for a "focus" on the sacred and everywhere-present naturalness of life, and for a moral focus. More important in the modern day than "Gods" is a reverential focus on "Ancestors"- for the Gods were, after all, the first Ancestors of all, so ancestral veneration is, in its own way, a return to a real polytheism such as people had long ago.

There are many ways to live in this world. You may choose "none of the above" with respect to what I have been discussing. In my way of seeing, just living respectfully and contentedly on your land, being in awe of the beauty and power of the earth and sky, reverencing the ancestors and/or the spirits of your dead family and friends, having great get-togethers with your living family and friends, and generally being a non-meddlesome, non-destructive, sincere person is enough. Such people might call themselves "Traditional Pagans", too- and they'd deserve the title.

From One Meadow, The Road Goes Deeper

If you want to be a "Traditional Witch", then there is yet another branch of the road to take. And that branch of the road doesn't have to come from being a Traditional Pagan; for me it did, and I think that the spiritual background and philosophical orientation of a Traditional Pagan is the ideal "starting point" for a Traditional Witch. I think it is ideal given its simplicity and its focus on the most important realities of life: that of the Weird, the Underworld, the notion of the sacredness of ordinary things, the reverence it has for the ancient Land, so full of light and dark powers, and respect for the ongoing existence of the dead *within* the land.

But there are witches out there who come out of other backgrounds. Some were even Christian, but trust me- I've seen them play witch for a few years and then vanish back to some church somewhere, or seen them sit in church the entire time, with their witchcraft never being anything other than a Saturday night amusement for them and their friends, a kink, a joke.

I think that Christianity's war on witchcraft and mysticism has closed its borders completely to witchcraft. I don't believe that the genuine, traditional Christian worldview- from any actual, historical denomination- can sustain a healthy or powerful practice of witchcraft. It is simple to see why: its own bible strongly condemns witchcraft and interaction with familiar spirits- and witchcraft, in the true, historical, and non-Wiccan sense of the word, requires deep interaction with familiar spirits.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, if you want to be a “Traditional Witch”, you have to establish yourself in a comfortable worldview, a comfortable mental “place”, a place where you are not held back by fear and absurdity, and then you must walk the *path that goes below*, to the deepest places of human experience.

Traditional Witchcraft is about consciously accessing hidden realities, and doing so to a very intense and extreme degree. It is about accessing extra-sensory reality, or the Underworld itself, looking into the hidden regions of the Weird, all without losing consciousness of what you are doing and experiencing, and “returning” to this seemingly ordinary world with the extraordinary powers you encountered on that “other side” still being carried within you.

One of those extraordinary powers will become your “familiar” power or spirit- a helper, an ally, who will be bonded to you by reciprocal oath and pact and service. He or she may come because one of the ancient spirits that men called “Gods” sends him to you, or it may come on its own, seemingly. Mysterious benefactors in the Unseen may come and grant you a familiar; one can never tell. You may have to find one through great struggle; there is no single formula, though there are some traditional formulas for those who are canny enough.

You must go, empowered by your familiar, in a state of intense “otherness” - a trance- and encounter the many strange powers and forces of the “other side” in alert wakefulness, and return to this world in wakefulness, never succumbing to the danger, confusion, or unconsciousness that overtakes most people who try to travel far from the beaten path of “ordinary” people.

Then, you must mediate- transmit- in some tangible form- the powers you encountered and “brought back” from the unseen world, and you must mediate them such that **tangible or perceivable changes** occur in “this world” due to your mediation.

Can you remove those fears and depressions or anxieties from your mind that have plagued you for years, through your power? Can you do it for others? Can you make a sick person whole? Can you see vengeance befall a man who has grievously harmed others? Can you use your power to gaze into the sky, a deep pool, or the painted symbols on cards to divine the future? Can you call to the dead, and meet them on your “flights” into the unseen, or see them rise out of the ground of their graves to speak to you through your extraordinary senses?

If you can do this, then you are a “witch”. You are a witch in the historical, traditional sense of the word. And that’s all. Your real *initiation* is not given to you by other humans; it is given to you when you cross into the Unseen, encounter powers there, discover power, and return in full wakefulness to integrate that power, guided by your

will, into your life or the lives of others. From this point, life goes on, but to where, none can say- for the most cunning witches can even transform their destiny beyond this world, when they must journey into the Underworld for the final time, at death. No matter where the spirits of the people of this world end up, they remain in the same place- the same Weird-wholeness of reality, and hopefully in cycles of wisdom and peace.

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THE WHITE PENIS CULT OF FOREST GROVE

By Sarah Lawless

THE WHITE PENIS CULT OF FOREST GROVE



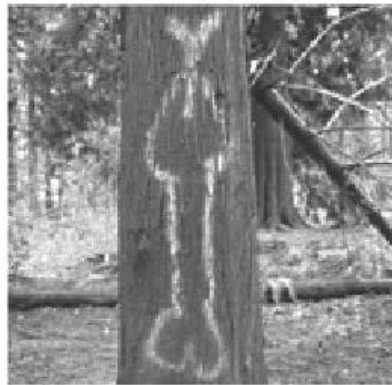
Pictograph no. 1



Pictograph no. 2



Pictograph no. 3



Pictograph no. 4



Pictograph no. 5



Pictograph no. 6

In my normal wanderings and hikes through the woods of Forest Grove in British Columbia, when I am foraging for herbs and plants, I have come across the repeated occurrence of white penises painted onto tree trunks. Upon following the phallic pictographs I discovered a grove of cedar trees with the remnants of a large fire pit near by. Accompanying the pictographs in this grove were multiple instances of the letters “NBS” also in the same white paint. After making this discovery near my home two years ago, I decided to research this mysterious phallic cult further and share my findings.

At first, I believed it was a purely phallic cult, but the addition of breast pictographs, pictographs as combinations of breast and a phallus, as well as a large pictograph representing sexual union, show that “NBS” are most likely a fertility cult celebrating both the masculine and feminine. My theory is that the “NBS” are a local cult of fertility worshippers as the phallic pictographs are saturated in one area of the woods along both

sides of a mountain stream which has carved a deep gully into the mountain. Perhaps the waters of life drew the white penis cult to practice in this area upon which they painted phalluses ejaculating the fluid of creation. In Pagan times, water and rain were seen as semen of the Sky God who fertilized Mother Earth. Pictograph no. 5 shows a man and a woman in the act of *Heiros Gamos*, the sacred marriage of the masculine and feminine. It is a primitive and vulgar image with the heads also representing breasts forming a possible sigil or symbol of power. This pictograph is present in the grove of sacred Cedar trees next to the fire pit and a ruined primitive wooden shelter.

Pictographs no. 1 & 2 were found across the stream with pictograph no. 3 painted on the wall of bridge which crosses the stream. In following this series of pictographs one is led down a small hidden forest trail. Pictograph no. 1 marks the halfway point of the trail, and pictograph no. 2, which is the only phallus found pointing downward, is positioned right across from a one to two centuries old holly tree. This pictograph and the holly tree are only a foot apart. The phallus markers stop after the holly tree. Perhaps this was considered a sacred tree where offerings or worship were practiced by the mysterious "NBS" group. Holly is a sacred tree of protection and is viewed as a masculine tree - possibly explaining the lack of testicles doubling as breasts in the pictograph next to the tree.

Pictograph no. 4 (shown above) marks the entrance to the Cedar grove on the opposite side of the stream from the holly tree. This pictograph marks a pathway that lines up exactly with the fire pit and a fallen Cedar tree featuring the largest painted phallus. As the fire pit seems to be the area of focus for worship, I believe the largest phallus pictograph to be of more importance than the others. It is the only pictograph featuring words as well; an arrow with the word "Woody" above it pointing to the large phallus. It is my speculation that this fallen Cedar represents a sacrificed male deity of the forest in the tradition of the divine kings and the life-death-rebirth gods of Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Egypt. In the local secret fertility cult I am a member of we use a fallen tree each year to represent the phallus of the male forest god who is reborn at the fire festival of May and dies every year at the feast of the dead in the autumn. The fallen tree representing the phallus is worshipped, decorated and danced around. That the fire pit is right in front of this fallen log shows that it was the centre of worship. I also speculate that the NBS group's name for the phallic deity is "Woody" due to the inscription; Woody being vulgar slang for penis.

My final conclusion is that this mysterious cult named NBS are no longer meeting as the fire pit has been disassembled for over 2 years and the primitive shelter has never been rebuilt, but instead has been allowed to rot. How long ago they were active, I cannot know for sure, but my best guess is within the past decade as the mosses and lichens which grow on the local trees have not yet obscured the phallic pictographs. My best estimation is that the NBS were a group of young adults local to the mountain

and Forest Grove, who met in the woods to celebrate the rites of passage of youth such as puberty, discovery of sexual drive, first kisses, loss of virginity, and possible resulting young parenthood. The mystery of how many members there were, whether they followed the beliefs of a fertility cults, and what the initials “NBS” stand for will have to always remain a mystery, but they have left behind their legacy in the form of pictographs, a sacred grove, and a sacred path.

Editor's note - As humanity has been remarkably prone to taking seriously what was poked at it in fun, it was deemed necessary to point out, for the sake of any who missed it, that this is a satirical piece, but also one that should make us think - what will the archaeologists of the future make out of the artefacts and remains that we leave behind?



WHERE THREE ROADS MEET HISTORY, LORE, AND PRACTICE OF CROSSROADS RITUAL

By Cory Hutcheson

*"The wood and stone were call'd the holy things,
And their sublime intent given to their kings.
All the atonements of Jehovah spurn'd,
And criminals to sacrifices turn'd."*

-William Blake, from "If it is true what the Prophets write"

Students of Traditional Craft and recovered lore inevitably bump up against several concepts repeatedly; the motifs of the lost child, the rewards of hospitality, etc. crop up again and again. Few are the seekers who go long without encountering the lore of the crossroads, one of the most enduring and powerful images in the practice of the Arte.

The crossroads in ancient times were often used as burial sites for criminals, and those religiously barred from funerary rites of a sacred nature. Boundaries were blurred at places not normally inhabited nor abandoned by the living. Because many people never left the city in their lifetime, crossroads were the mortal province of traveling merchants, wandering soldiers, thieves, and witches or sorcerers living at the outskirts of civilization. The latter were the ones who were most likely to frequent a particular crossing at fairly regular intervals. Crossroads, being both at the farthest edges of cities or villages, places of rest for the restless, and with their hidden powers watched by deities like Hermes and Hekate, made for good hedge-jumping.

Witches and sorcerers have had associations with crossroads since at least late antiquity, when Roman tastes assigned Hekate the role of "witch-goddess" to add to her other duties. Many of the Crafters of old would have lived near crossroads and been familiar with the comings and goings of people beyond the town or city proper. This information and the contacts they made served them well, in that they had access to knowledge and materials that those in the city seldom saw. They also would learn of the regions around them, the customs and workings of those whose kingdom they shared, though they might be very different in habit and manner. Of course, being familiar with exotic or alien people and forces had a habit of tarnishing the reputations of those who held intercourse with foreign elements, including foreign gods.

Herms, stone representations of the god Hermes usually displaying erect phalluses, were situated at most crossroads, as were masks representing the Queen of Liminal Spaces,

Hekate. Though modern representations of Hekate often show her in a triple aspect with goddesses such as Artemis and Persephone and associate her with the waning moon and a “crone” figure, this was hardly how the ancients viewed her. A beautiful goddess of midwifery, possibly related to the frog-headed Egyptian goddess Heqit, she was an exotic import into the pantheon of the Greeks. While she has always had her chthonic side (most ancient deities had at least one dark attribute), her role, like that of Hermes, was that of psychopomp. Gods of crossroads were gods that could ferry one between the realms of the living and the dead, the Middleworld and the Underworld. Nigel Jackson noted the importance of these spaces in his discussion of “hedge-riders” or *haegtessa*—those who could slip between worlds by various means. The role of those who could navigate these in-between spaces made them incredibly valuable to both the living and the dead.

It is also worth examining the forms different crossroads took. A three-way crossroads was especially significant to Hekate, who did have a three-faced aspect (though all the faces were beautiful maidens and not the lately introduced “three-fold lunar goddess” design so familiar in modern renditions). A four-way crossing held a potential for change, a bit of lore which gets reflected in fairy tales and even in cartomancy today—the four of any suit representing a decision to be made or a static location with choices pulling the questioner in each direction. Perhaps the best known crossroads in the crafting community is one “where three roads meet,” an intersection of three roads which forms a six-rayed star. Symbolism at such a place was similar to the “forked” road or three-way crossing already mentioned. However, the six spokes on the “wheel” of the crossroads also corresponded to Craft-related symbols: the form of arrows crossed on a stang, for example. Evan John Jones, in his book *Sacred Mask, Sacred Dance*, calls on Myrddin as guardian of the crossroads, and connects the goddess Elen to roads on the mythic landscape. This brings up an important point: intersections do not exist without roads, and those roads are often worth exploring for a Crafter.

The roads leading to and away from these liminal intersections have their own mystical weight. In the fairy tale “Godfather Death,” a father desperate to find someone to care for his 13th child runs out into the road to meet potential candidates for his child’s godfather. In this case, he must choose between God, the Devil, and Death—finally opting for the latter due to his equal-handed dealings with everyone. Contextually, Death can be seen as a crossroads figure in this story—an impartial mediator between God and the Devil in this tale. He is also a “road taken” by the characters in the story. The father’s desire to have his child “initiated” into Death’s care may call to mind the sacrificial nature of a Traditional Craft initiation. Robert Cochrane’s admonition to an initiate, “You will die many times to be reborn in this religion, and each little death is the resurrection of new hope and spirit” echoes this entry into a spiritual threshold. Even Christian initiatory practices like baptism are often referred to as a “burial,” with morbid connotations firmly attached. This sublimated symbolism,

however, is a development of the longstanding importance of a physical crossroads to magical practice. Choosing a road to follow and walking it without fear is as important to sturdy practice as knowing how to read the symbols along the way.

Much of the folklore of Old Europe traveled the Atlantic and found a new home in America, and crossroads tales were no exception. Many of the old associations lingered, with crossings remaining places of mystery, fear, darkness, and magic. The names that were connected to these intersections began to change, however. While the popular European memory still associated crossroads with Hekate or Hermes, they were no longer represented in the New World, save for occasionally as ghosts or specters haunting some of the most rural junctions. Instead, American folk magic and traditions—Pow Wow and Hoodoo—began to place new figures at crossroads. This author can speak little to the Pow Wow side of the subject, but in Hoodoo these intersections offer a variety of spirits to work with. One of the most famous is Elegba, or Papa Legba, the first line of contact in the Vodoun spirit world (Hoodoo and Vodoun are not the same, but share some of the same *orisha*, or spirits/deities, to work with). A bit of a trickster, he is offered rum, candy, and tobacco to entreat his aid in “opening the way” for a rootworker. Standing as he does between worlds—one of his primary roles is to act as a go-between for mortals and the *orisha*—he is an ideal power to meet at a dark crossroads and work a trick or two.

Another key force to be met at a crossroads in Hoodoo lore is the Black Man (or sometimes “Man in Black” or “Devil”). This crossroads spirit is unique to American magical craft in that his purpose is extremely well defined. The most famous example of the Black Man is found in reference to the blues legend of Tommy Johnson (often falsely attributed to Robert Johnson). Tommy Johnson, according to the story, took his guitar to a crossroads and “sold his soul to the Devil” in exchange for his skill in playing his instrument. Many variations on this rite exist, with some of the common themes being:

- Learning an instrument
- Learning to gamble and win
- Learning specific arcane arts, like card reading
- Visiting the crossroads on a succession of midnights
- Visiting the crossroads and facing a succession of black beasts (bear, dog, etc.) before meeting the Devil

It is important to note a few things about Hoodoo crossroads meetings. First, that while many stories mention meeting or even selling one’s soul to the Devil, almost none of them make any mention of the consequences of such an action. The idea of punishment in Hell is overlooked or simply not a consideration, because the Devil associated with the crossroads is not connected to the biblical Satan/Sathan. His gifts

are also very specifically limited to tactile skills—instruments, gambling, and the like, and if he demands a price, it is a recognition of his power by pledge of service (the “selling of one’s soul”) or a facing down of fears (the facing of the black beasts, or sometimes tempestuous weather). Thus, the Black Man is not entirely unlike other similar figures in European lore, also commonly figured as devils in fairy tales (see “The Devil’s Sooty Brother” or “The Devil’s Grandmother” for a contrast of devils who provide their supplicants with many blessings and exact no more than service or an answer to a challenge for their fee).

In modern Craft practice, it is sometimes very difficult to find a crossroads where one can operate undisturbed. While some are able to overcome this problem and still visit an actual crossroads, ducking behind hedges and whatnot for cover (and here the author speaks from some experience), some are simply stuck in a position where going to a crossing means visiting an intersection on a busy city block or standing in the middle of traffic—neither being good options. In such a case, there are ways to bring a crossroads to one’s working space.

A Compass set about with the cardinal directions is already a crossroads of sorts. In this case, one can absolutely work as though one were at a physical crossroads—in a manner of speaking, that’s exactly what has been formed. However, some spaces do not naturally lend themselves to intersecting ley lines and forming a crossroads. In this case, iron implements can be used to “irrigate” the space with the ghost-roads. By simply placing a cauldron or other iron instrument in such a way as to draw the flow of power within the round one can build as many intersections as are necessary to the work at hand. The caution with this is that these roads are “new” in a sense, and so the mythic landscape may take time to adapt to the adjustment (or rather, the practitioner may take time to adapt his or her understanding of the mythic landscape after the adjustment).

Another method of creating the crossroads space can again be taken from Hoodoo. Many root doctors (one of the many names for Hoodoo practitioners) place an altar in their working space with a solar cross in it. Some read this through a Christian lens and see the cross within the circle as a representation of the late great J.C. (to steal Peter Paddon’s term). However, reliable sources on the practice indicate that its primary symbolism is as a version of the crossroads in miniature. Often drawn in a specific one of the Hoodoo powders (such as Hot Foot or Essence of Bend Over) or sometimes in red brick dust, the cross brings in forces, specifically the powers of Elegba or other spirits, which can be appealed to for aid in any of the crossroads workings one would typically do at a physical juncture.

The history and symbolism of crossroads in magical practice continues to be valuable to Craft-minded folks today. Whether they address Hekate at a lonely country spot

where three roads literally converge, or whether they simply incorporate the image of such a place into a pathworking, Crafters gain from working with crossroads. They're not likely to leave the stream of practice anytime soon. And they're great fun to work with, besides.

Finally, this author thought it would be worthwhile to include a crossroads working in the spirit of balancing lore with practice. Below is a rite taken from the American magical tradition of Conjure, also known as Hoodoo or Root Work.

Hoodoo Crossroads Disposal

In Hoodoo, the disposal of magical materials is important. One of the most common ways to dispose of ingredients is at a crossroads.

Go to a crossroads under cover of darkness, preferably near midnight. Bring an offering of candy or tobacco and walk in a circle (clockwise or counterclockwise... whatever suits your purpose), petitioning the spirits of the junction for their aid. Leave the offering for them at the corner of the crossroads, generally in the East. Then take the materials you wish to dispose of, and toss them over your left shoulder into the crossroads, saying these or similar words:

“Papa Legba, Esu Orisha, be my aid!”

Walk away from the crossroads without looking back.

This method is especially good if your working involved something that needs to be dispersed over a distance or over time, such as a spell to call someone who's far away or to get rid of someone you don't want around anymore.

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FAERIE: THE AGE OF THE UNSEEN AND THE UNKNOWN

A DISCOURSE ON THE DANGERS OF THE FAERY-WORLD AND THE AGE-FULL POWER OF THE HIDDEN REALITY

By Robin Artisson

“They laugh and are glad and are terrible:
When their lances shake, every green reed quivers.
How beautiful they are
How beautiful the lordly ones
In the hollow hills.”

- Fiona Macleod

There is an Unseen World

There is an unseen world that haunts mankind. It's always been here; it will always be here. I've experienced its edges and corners and one of its deep wells, and to this day, I don't really know what it is. I call it a “world unseen”, just as others have, and for you, this may call to mind ideas of an “otherworld”, or a faerie world, a spirit world, some unseen dimension, some heaven, some hell, some pocket reality, some precious mystery, some mystical place.

All of these terms are fine and all of these terms are failures, really, because they are all just words. I call it a “world” because many others have said it, but it was no world that I read about in books on folklore or mythology, and certainly not a “world” that I experienced. There is an extra-ordinary layer of human experience (or perhaps “just experience”) that we have access to, or maybe I should say “has access to us”- but all of my thoughts about it, all of my hopes and dreams about it, my beliefs- they are really just guesses and fears. I think back to my times in this “otherworld” and I can't put two and two together. I didn't even have “times” there- Just tastes of something strange and impossible to explain to my satisfaction. I don't know what happened.

Dust from Dangerous Doors

Human beings haven't stopped talking about the unseen world, since their first days. We've always known (or hoped, or dreaded) that our range of experience is broader than what we normally imagine, and we've lived in awe of the few times that we've experienced the wonder of that “greater glimpse” of the unseen. Whatever we “saw over there”, I know it can be thought of as quite distinct from

us- but is it? What if “over there” was “in here” too? I’ve long discussed the need to drop our absurd and habitual mental labels, divisions, and lines if we wish to engage the mystical vision, and I stand by that to this day- there is a clean and pure experience of wonder, of “otherness” that is possible to us if we allow ourselves to be free of our “wall building” habits. But is it always a good idea?

I must say, it is not. Years ago, I was a psychic voyeur of types; the thrill of the vision was my joyride. I reasoned to myself that visionary states, of the type that I could invoke using various mystical techniques, were perfectly natural and normal, and thus, (my reasoning ran further) they had some role in human spiritual development. If there were otherworlds, and if sentient beings inhabited them, then the capacity held by each human to experience those things was something we should be developing.

I know that I was wrong to think in this manner. While I still believe “sight” and “trance vision” to be perfectly natural to human beings, I no longer burden myself with the naive notion that all things natural to humankind are desirable or even necessary. That may sound like a scandalous thing to say, and this statement certainly doesn’t extend to those natural aspects of humanity that have been excoriated by mainstream religions, such as sexuality and the like; no, I’m referring to the natural capacities of human beings to experience reality in a greater sense than we normally do.

How in the world could something as basic and simple as “experience” be a problem? I hope that my words will reach the eyes and ears of understanding, for what I am about to say, I wish I had said before, long ago. Our range of experience defines us- it creates all of our memories, builds our personalities, and sets us within the limits defined as “sane” by our societies. The artistic and the poetic- those most precious pylons of creativity that alone have led people for ages into ranges of experience that they could not have reached on their own- these things are the children of the “extranormal” investigation and exercise of experience. We all sense the value of poetry and art because we know that they are emissaries from something greater.

The poet or poetess, like the artist of the sacred, opens themselves to the dangerous reaches of the unseen, and as the story of the Leannan Sidhe tells us, they sometimes pay a price for their Dionysian ecstasies. Even those artists of the tame and the lame- those who, in age past, have labored away at dreary and linear tasks and created representations lacking the fire of real creativity- even those artists, on some level, were sweeping the dust from dangerous doors.

Faery Struck

Opening up to a single glimpse of something that one’s mind cannot cope with or integrate can be devastating, or deadly. The death-blow may come as shock or fear, or (worse) as madness. The “fairy struck” of folklore, and the “fairy led”- there is

no return for these poor souls. What would they return to? The world that they left, which is not there for them anymore: the world of men and women, bakers and milkmaids, cows and horses, cars and factories, roads and parks

When you've seen the Otherness, felt its power, there is a forever alien disturbance hanging over these things- How simple it would be if there were just a park, just an oak tree, just a park-bench! Just a calm and happy world with marketplaces and gas-stations and shopping malls- but this is all ephemeral- all of our times, places, and lives- all of these things are small, flaming pieces of refuse inside of a boundless darkness that is more vast than we can imagine, and the slightest hint of its vastness doesn't look or sound like anything- it only feels like something: it feels like nausea.

There is something literally beyond belief "hanging over" everything we think we know- at once mystical and menacing- you might call it the "sacred presence of the otherworld", but those words are (in one respect) very deceitful- they seem positioned to take away the dread of it all. We forget this today, but What is sacred can be very frightening.

The park and the sunlit avenue, and the shopping mall- if that is all your range of experience lets you see, count yourself lucky. There is more happening here. I have no doubt that dying out of this range of experience that we call "this world" means continuing on in another one, and perhaps those dead people have a different time of it- but for we people here and now who open the "other" eyes, there is a phantasmagoria there, a bizarre glamour that harms as much as it helps.

It helped me to have faith in what most people could not see, but it has harmed me in ways- I fear sometimes that my own grip on things may be further gone than even I realize, and I wonder (sometimes) if I'm a spiritual danger to those around me. This simple paranoia is born in an easy-to-understand place: I know that I've encountered otherworldly powers and sentient beings. Once you see them, and they see you, a channel of communication is open, maybe for a long time, maybe forever. I hadn't thought about that when I was a younger man. I wish I had.

Dread, Awe, and Sanity

Our ancestors lived in dread and awe of the Otherworld. The new-age world, with all its flaky bullcockery regarding things "fairy" and "otherworldly" has taken our attention off of the most vital of facts- that our ancestors regarded the unseen with fears and terrors, as well as with (sometimes) wonders. How can we read all these fairy stories and folklore and see the dangers of the Faerie world, and not understand that "Fairie" is no just an idle name for an idyllic afterlife, or a childish world of wonder? What about the dark tale of Selena Moor? What about Thomas the Rhymer?

Our ancestors, up into the last few centuries, ran face to face with a terrible and majestic reality which is just out of our sight, but which is real- and they had no illusions about it. Today, wiccans and new-agers go for sport on Beltaine nights and Samhain nights to old Faery-mounds in Britain and Ireland, without often considering that wise Pagan ancestors- not just superstitious and afraid Christian ancestors- both would have advised against doing so. Why?

Because an extra-ordinary mystery can crack open on those nights and at those places, and it can steal a person's soul- and their mind. As I have said before, but never with enough strength or force, real spirituality dealing with the otherworld is serious; it is not for play; it has dangers. I wonder if I would have written some of the things I did write, and made so available, if I had really thought this through years ago.

Sanity is an issue. We love to laugh at how over-rated sanity is, and it is the done-to-death style of the young and the rebellious who wish to break the boundaries set down for them by their elders to "question everything" including what we call "normal and sane", but let me tell you- it is not overrated.

It is precious and valuable, and this world needs it. It's not a joke to have your mind's boundaries so violated by novel experiences- especially experiences so far out of the range of "normalcy" that they must be called "otherworldly"- such that one's mind can never again settle comfortably within one's own world of birth. Kids sitting around playing "crazy" and enjoying reputations for being "crazy" or "insane" aren't being cute; if they had to actually work or live around truly mentally ill people, they'd sober right up, let me assure you!

Few things are as devastating or dangerous as mental illness, and our minds aren't as strong as we'd imagine them to be, or like them to be. A peek down the wrong rabbit hole can inspire a lifelong curse of fear or confusion.

The Tinsel-Winged Horror

What could be more infuriating than the modern hordes of kids who play with their tinsel-winged fairies? From girls running to and fro with cute little butterfly wings on, spreading clouds of glitter, to neo-pagans "visualizing" faeries as little tinkerbells and cute, cuddly "elementals" who serve their pink pentagram goddess, the world has gone mad with regard to the truths about the Faery-world. Thank the Victorian-age artist/pedophiles who gave us the toothless and lame (yet enduring) vision of the tiny fairy with butterfly wings. Thank them and then remember to spit on their graves if you ever pass by one.

These modern kids (and sadly, adults), especially those who fool themselves into thinking that they are performing "spiritual" or "magical" acts that overlap with

the faerie-reality- are recklessly creating the conditions for terror and madness, and grinning the entire time. They are dishonoring a real tradition that never, ever, made faeries into playthings and cutesy little goth-gowned sprites, nor things to be playfully and regularly invoked for any purpose.

The only thing that I believe protects this mass of unfortunates is the fact of their sheer foolishness and lack of seriousness- this sort of nonsense must keep them safely from the truth about Faerie or its many hidden entrances, in such a manner that their minds can never engage the darkness beneath. Perhaps the unseen powers have a bit of mercy on this point, and disregard this crowd of blithering idiots; I hope so. The “goth” fairy-sector may be just as ridiculous, but at least they are one degree closer to the truth- skulls, corpse-white skin, and faeries do genuinely go together, and have a traditional connection that goes back to the first graves of this world.

As for the rest, I hear people talk about “dark fairy tales”, as though there were any other kind! I may sound a bit harsh, but these are matters of substance and importance- and the kindness of the wise is the cruelty of the foolish. The other day, a friend of mine pointed out that some new-age catalogue that showed up at his house was selling “Fairy Doors” for people’s homes. I understand that sometimes, a piece of home decor is just a piece of decor, but really, I had to laugh and then cry.

The Green Throng of Vision-Daimons

Maturity has everything to do with controlling our range of experience- policing those ranges on our own. I once opened myself up to terrifying and strange things in the unseen world, and I did it simply because I could- I was intoxicated on the ability that my fetch gave me to have visionary experiences. I lucked out, and was able to return to this life after three full days of being captive in a frightening place- but to this day, much of that experience is not something I enjoy thinking about.

It isn’t enough to seek out “otherworldly” experiences “because we can” or because it’s new, unique, or just a curiosity. I know the seduction is there, but it is the same seduction that leads to hallucinogen use, like mushrooms or LSD- and goodness knows that those things can be damaging to the sanity (though they are, I think, less damaging than the power of the Otherworld).

The “psychedelic” consciousness-trippers are a good example of people who use chemicals to gain just a taste of the unseen world’s great infinity and depth. These people do it largely for amusement, or for whatever “scientific” or “spiritual” justifications they invent to sooth their consciences. They all find the same thing- there is something delirious and mind-blowing just on the other side of perception, though their drugs only get them to the outermost regions of it all.

No matter how great the peyote was, the LSD, the lysergic acid, the morning glory,

the psilocybin, the datura, it's all the same thing- weeds on the roadside, shite buttons in the pasture. It doesn't begin to drag a person into the true heart of darkness that hangs like the void of space over all things. The vision-teaching Daimons that appear to us as these various sacred plants are deceitful, and they've had to become so, considering how abused they are today by the fools of this world.

To go into the tangled green and lose one's senses is to make oneself available to be devoured by the inhabitants of that spirit-wild. This is the danger of the "entheogen" path; this is the danger that people refuse to see because they want, so dearly, for there to be an easy path to the beatific vision of truth. There is no easy path. You've heard it before, and it was true then, just as it is now. The green throng helped our ancestors in times distant, but in most cases, we've lost the wisdom to deal with them; we've become food for them now. Not everything in the natural world is peaceful and safe; like with the Otherworld, the forest and fields have their own dangers.

The Hidden Queen is in Her Court

Faerie-Elfhame is a place of great wonder and great beauty, and great danger and fear. I can't say this enough: A hidden Queen is in her Court, surrounded by her lords and knights, and by the throngs of the dead, some of whom hold on desperately to the idea that they are still alive. I have given keys to Her doors in some of my works, and now, for the sake of decency, I must warn those who use my works that they cannot tread with carelessness on the hidden roads that lead to these deeper places.

People to whom I have spoken about this accused me of trying to frighten them. I told them that if they weren't frightened at least a bit, they needed to get that way. Fear is part of respect when it comes to the Otherworld, and especially to that pale strand of the Otherworld that encloses the world's dead. The dead are taken by death, and they are compelled by the power of Fate into certain transformations, changes that occur in accord with their own natures and with deeper mysteries that cannot be fathomed. The death-metamorphosis is not kindly to some, and many don't even realize what is happening to them. They become the faces of the Otherworld that can terrify or illuminate those who glimpse them- but no matter what we see or what we feel when we catch a blessed/cursed glimpse beyond the green curtain, we are all looking at our own destinies. We are all waiting for our turn to take the ghost-roads and we are all due to enter into the surreal realm of illusions, self-knowledge, and consequence, one day.

I might say that we're already there; this world has more than it's share of illusions, opportunities for self-knowledge, and consequences. But this world affords us the

possibility of spiritual laziness and physical over-indulgence- all resulting in a long period of denial that most of us call “our lives”. That all ends when the opulent visions of Faery dawn- whether you are alive or dead, to be faced with the Great Otherness is to be faced with a power that tears you out of your boundaries and refuses to allow you to re-settle back into them. We can call that “death” or we can call it “spiritual awakening”- either way, your tidy life is over.

The wise and meritorious of this world have blessings lined up for them, to be sure- no God will control our destiny in the next world, only our quality as people, our hard-won wisdom, and our goodness. Those who want to split hairs with relativist arguments about goodness will have their mouths sewn shut by the pale hands of the imps of Elfhame, no matter how ingenious their arguments were in this world of drunks and fools. The wisdom of the half wise (and that includes those who turn a biting tongue to the idea of goodness or wisdom or love) is the dust that the throngs of the Ever-Living wipe from the bottoms of their shoes, the ashes and soot of the charnel houses of the Unseen World wherein all mortal illusions are burned.

Goodness is a power, and every heart knows good when it feels it. Wisdom is the same way- only the wise are safe from the Glamours of the Underworld and the Faerie throngs, for wisdom means knowing what is real from what seems to be real.

What is the measure of a man? Many have asked, and many have answered, but I say that the measure of a man is both his wisdom, and his capacity to give and receive love. A man is measured by who he loves, and who loves him back. And if you think that love- that mysterious power that drives us to sacrifice everything for the good of another- is a weakling’s tower of retreat, you need look no further than the Ballad of Tam Lin to see it’s great benefit. Love can fight the glamour of Faerie. It was Janet’s love for Tam Lin that led her to fight off the terrible illusions of the Faeries, and rescue her love from the grasp of the Faerie Queen who held him.

Remember that the Faerie-people are not evil, and the majesty of their unseen world is not deadly; it is a reflection, in a way of this world: it is both good and evil, majestic and terrible, safe in times and seasons, and dangerous in others. To see them riding along, through day and night, on their faery-mounts, is to see a vision of great sacredness and great power- but the sacred can’t be the sacred without a sense of awe. Bear in mind that the word “awful” is derived from “Awe-full”- to behold the Royalty of Faery is to see something full of awe; to see the dead, circling in their sacred transformations, to see the wise, transcended men and women of the Unseen, to see the shadows and the light of the Otherworld is to see something that inspires awe, which is genuinely awe-full. If you don’t feel it, you haven’t seen it.

Some believe that the inhabitants of the Unseen World are the Gods and Goddesses of old. To this, I answer: In my experience, some were, and some are still the Gods

of some mortals who worship them. They do honor agreements and contracts and they do honor genuine worship, but not in the manner that most people hope- it is not a contract of sentiment but a contract of honor and of submission to necessity.

These “Lordly Ones in the Hollow Hill” do not tolerate flighty behavior; they do not maintain bonds with mortals who break promises, and they don’t protect those who harm the land or besmirch beauty, memory, or wisdom. They gain from their relations with mortals, and they have powers we can’t imagine. And yet, for all this, they will not live life for mortals, nor can they. A man or woman must be skilled, strong-hearted, and clever if they would have a successful relationship with the “Gods” of this world.

any cannot do this; many cannot be this- too many are made lazy on the diet of prayer and submission taught by Christianity and Islam, in which one’s life is laid down on the altar of the Ancient Hebrew God. The Gods of Old Europe don’t take your life and live it for you; if you seek their power and gifts, and if you are fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to gain their true attentions, you will discover that your life will more than likely end in disaster if you refuse to do as the Awesome Mystery of the Wholeness and the Strange Wyrd-Will of the Unseen world beckons. If you open yourself to this reality, it makes demands. One good look inside, and you have new obligations.

You See Them and They See You

Gazing into an abyss is no easy matter; the act of looking causes changes. There is no “one way sight”- to see something is to interact with it, to be changed by it. Looking into the depths means that the depths “look into you”, in both a poetic sense, and in a very actual sense. One might speculate that the act of looking is a wholeness that our minds divide- perhaps unwisely- into two halves. If this is so for looking, for seeing, then it must be true for any mode of perception. There is a hidden key to wholeness in this sort of thinking.

And this same thinking can be applied to the world of our experience, and the unseen world. If you do this, and do it successfully, you discover the key to understanding the most awesome mystery of all- how and why you have a presence- a part of yourself- on the “other side”. The Fetch-twin, the Faery Co-Walker, the Unseen Otherself is there; it’s real; and while you stand, gazing with awe at the light between the two Thorn trees, or at the grim hump of the Faery-mound on certain nights, this Twin of yours is already feasting at the tables below, or riding in the Unseen Procession.

How alluring it seems! But the problem with the allure of the “Other” is simple: wholeness means death to mortal beings. Are you prepared to die? Wholeness is either death to your old way of seeing, believing, and thinking, or it is death in the

traditional sense: your corpse to a grave, and your soul to the Faery-trod roads that lead under the roots and hills of this world into the reaches of the Unseen.

Don't be in denial, and don't be blind. Give this the seriousness it deserves. The ages-old charms against Faeries, that any student of folklore may find in any good book- they deserve a second look by you. If you have a family, you **MUST** protect them, for just being around you becomes its own species of danger for them.

There is a dangerous game being played here, by those who seek the wisdom of the true Faery-Faith: how to obtain the wisdom of wholeness without dying. Taliesin couldn't steal it from his own Faery-Queen without her showing her predatory face and devouring him; Tam Lin couldn't steal it without a more powerful magic preserving him; no story that tells us of the "theft of knowledge or wisdom" from the unseen world fails to show us the crimson and dark consequences of the theft.

Don't look the other way, regarding this: you are stealing from the Otherworld when you wish to plumb its secrets. I'm not saying that we shouldn't seek wholeness; I'm saying that Fate has seen fit **NOT** to bestow wholeness consciously on every living mortal; in this age, as in the past, conscious wholeness is reserved for those who are prepared to go against the grain, and risk great spiritual, mental, and physical dangers. You cannot start walking on this path, nor playing this chess game against the masters of the Unseen world, until you give them the greatest tribute they deserve: awe and respect, and enough fear to make you wise. This is the hidden Faery-meal; they know you as a serious player as soon as you reveal the wisdom of awe.

After that, a dangerous road starts, but one with the possibility of a great payoff. The wise will seek allies- allies in the unseen are no harder or easier to gain than allies in this world. Like with any long and difficult journey, the right allies, guides, and protectors are needed. Like with any kind of interaction between sentient beings, respect is the most important rule. A kind heart, a good heart, it is the best mark of your quality.

The right technologies are needed to face the dangers and obstacles that will be there. What you need is hiding in the traditions of our ancestral past; don't ignore them. And don't ever forget that what you are doing is a serious matter. I strongly urge each person who wishes to join in the games of the Underworld to reconsider at least a few times, and I urge any who have even the first bit of difficulty with these ideas to cease going forward, and retire from these matters altogether.

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OF FAERY, FEESH, AND FAMILIAR

By Veronica Cumber

One of the most vital components of being a Witch is to have a strong and fruitful connection to other realms of planes of existence than our own. Not only is it a good idea for a Witch to be able to travel, mentally or spiritually, to these “elsewhere” places, but also to have beings from these other planes come to this side to be with us. Relationships such as these are often referred to as having a *spirit familiar* or simply a *familiar*. A familiar is an entity that is attached to a Witch and can appear in visions, dreams, through a voice that only the Witch can hear, or even in visual form if they so desire.

The idea of Witches having familiar spirits is an old one and can sometimes seem confusing as familiars can appear in many different ways and even change their shape. They may look like an animal or they may appear in human form or even in other ways unfamiliar to common understanding. Familiar spirits can be passed from one Witch to another, sometimes down family lines, or they can be acquired from the Gods or by magickal rites. Famous historical and legendary figures may appear as familiars or even an actual ancestor of the Witch in question. Familiars can also be elemental spirits, occasionally ones attached to a particular object or to a sacred place.

For example, familiars can be kept in objects such as boxes or pots, a habit that is reminiscent of modern *voudoun* practice where ancestral spirits are kept in pots called *govi*, there to be called upon for advice and aid. They can inhabit stones or gems, blades and grottos, springs and groves. Joan of Arc had a host of familiar spirits who spoke with her, spirits associated with a particular Faery tree in the region where she grew up. She may have prevaricated by calling them “angels,” but clearly they served the same purpose as familiar spirits do for their favorite Witch.

Basically, any non-corporeal entity that we as Witches have forged a relationship with, often through the medium of our blood, and that we commonly use in the practice of the Craft can be termed a familiar spirit or familiar. These spirits take on many different forms and aspects because they not only need to be able to make that first contact with us, but they need to have that connection be strong enough to create a useful and lasting bridge between our two worlds. The best way to build this sort of bridge is through employment of a powerful and intense imagination, concentration, and above all emotion, in particular that of deep affection, desire, or love.

A Witch needs to have a strong affection for their familiar, just as the familiar needs to have a strong affection for their Witch. They should be fascinated by each other and long to be together. This intense emotion not only draws Witch and familiar spirit

together in the beginning, but is also key to opening the door for the familiar to even be there in the first place. This door is an outer door, one that pierces the veil between worlds, but at the same time it's an inner door that lies within each of us as Witches. In essence, they much are the same door. When we and our familiars form this kind of intimate connection, we become as one in many ways, which creates a far more powerful being than any Witch alone. Through this relationship, we can call upon energies beyond those of this world to add to our own magick, thus making it more potent and far-reaching in effect. Our particular familiar or crew of familiars are a direct link to the forces of Faery, the currents that move behind the skin of mundane reality.

In this way, familiar spirits can serve as protectors, servants, and a general aid to magickal work by lending their energy to we whom they are attached to. Familiar spirits might also be consulted through us as we serve as mediums by those seeking advice or prophecy, a technique still being employed today by Spiritualists. They may also be used for divination and as guardians and guides when we need to venture into their own realm, the land sometimes called the Otherworld or Faery. Where we go, our familiar goes.

In recent times, some Witches have taken to calling their family pets their familiars or, because they have a certain fascination or fondness for an animal, fish, bird or other creature, common or mythological, may feel that these beings are their familiars. Of course, if one believes strongly enough in the idea that a family pet or a mythical being has some magickal energy embodied in them and that energy may be called upon, there is nothing to say that any creature, either real or imaginative, cannot come to be used as a familiar. A familiar might also sometimes choose to take on the appearance of a real animal or pet, perhaps explaining how it sometimes seems that a cat can be seen in one place and then appear in another place but a moment later.

Still, in the old days, familiars tended not to be physical beings per se but spirits that could take on the form or appearance of physical beings if they so chose, sometimes even changing the shape they decided to appear in. The witch trials often described familiars as creatures that looked something *like* a particular animal, not necessarily *as* a particular animal. Which isn't to say that a spirit hasn't taken up residence within a real cat or dog or ferret or toad or bird and so can serve the Witch as their familiar. But familiars could also look like human beings or far more fantastical things. One such example were the creatures that defied description when a man in Connecticut in the 1600's claimed that he saw an accused witch in the woods with three other women, all of them dancing around two "black creatures" or "black things."^{a1} In another instance, the familiar of a Witch named Margaret Waite looked like "a deformed thing with many feet, black of colour, rough with hair, the bigness of a cat."^{b2}

Familiar spirits have also been known to take on the aspect of familiar people. The accused Witch, Bessie Dunlap, described one of her familiar spirits as Thome Reid, a man who had been killed in a battle some years before.^{c3} The somewhat infamous Isobel Gowdie went on at length about her coven's horde of human appearing spirits and not only named each witch they were attached to but described their familiars by name and the color of the clothing that they wore. They had such fantastical, historical, and even legendary names such as "The Roring Lyon," "Mak Hector," "Robert the Rule," "Thieff of Hell, Wait wpon Hir Selfe," "The Read Reiver," "Robert the Jackis," and Thomas a Fearie."^{d4} The last name is a dead giveaway to the nature of the spirit in question and, quite possibly, hearkens back to the tale of Thomas the Rhymer, a figure with intimate ties to Faery.

Sometimes, though, just one familiar per Witch wasn't enough. George Giffard in his books from the 1500's talked about Witches' familiar spirits by saying that "some hath one, some hath more, as two, three, foure, or five, some in one likenesse, and some in another, as like cats, weasils, toades, or mise, whom they nourish with milke or with a chicken, or by letting them suck now and then a drop of bloud."^{e5} This does not seem surprising when you consider that giving milk or blood, usually three drops, was often a way to make a deal with the denizens of Faery and would definitely create a strong connection between both Witch and familiar.

One Witch in the 1600's further testified to the fact that "if a witch have but one marke, shee hath but one spirit; if two, then two spirits; if three, yet but two spirits. Shee alsoe saith, that men witches usually have women spirits, and women witches men spirits."^{f6} This is reminiscent of the Witch or cunning folk's relationship with Faery, in that the faery or fetch spirit which is attached to each of us, while normally of both genders in their own realm, quite often takes on the guise of the opposite gender to those they have made a connection to.

This guise symbolically reflects the way that they become our opposite and match—husband, wife, lover—in metaphysical manners, whether the outward form the spirit picks ends up being male or female. The more important aspect of this relationship is that they take on aspects that will interlock with, reflect upon, and best aid us, their beloved. For example, if someone has a difficult time with finding the humor in things and tends to be far too serious and bookish, their Faery or fetch match might be of particularly mirthful mien and push them towards more of a focus on emotion and direct experience.

In essence, each of us as Witches or cunning ones has a Faery familiar, a Faery match, waiting in the wings for us to open that inner door and make contact, an idea that is reminiscent of the Christian idea of everyone having a guardian angel. Though we don't just expect that familiar spirit to simply here to watch over us, but to take an

active role in our path and practice of the Craft. To that purpose, besides the one Faery “love” or partner we each might have, multitudes of other potential familiars await interaction. They wait for that emotional bridge to be created and for them to be invited, consciously or unconsciously, into our lives. Traditionally, the best time for creating this kind of bridge is at All Hallow’s Eve when it is well known that the veil between worlds is thin.

Not surprisingly, considering the wide range of familiars of the past, familiars of today can also take on many forms and aspects. It’s probably a good idea not to try to restrict too much whatever shape these spirits might appear, seeing it instead as an opportunity to explore not just our own inner nature, but the nature of Faery and of the Otherworld. Familiars are personal to every Witch and to that Witch alone and the form that this intimate relationship takes on is equally personal. It has a lot to teach us, most especially regarding aspects of our own untapped powers and potential abilities. By interaction with different spirits, we can learn how to bring these powers more fully into our own lives and become all the stronger for it, emotionally, physically, mentally, and magickally.

Of course, we can have a familiar take on the shape of the very traditional cat, but we could also have as a familiar spirit a famous person, creature, or character from history, legend, or even modern books and movies. Each to their own. Faery will work with what works, seeking the door that can be unlocked and the bridge that can be built, no matter what form that might mean. What might seem odd to one can feel perfectly right to another. Which is to say that each of us makes the connections that we can, in the best way that we can, and as powerful emotion is pivotal to this relationship that same emotion will play a part in how the familiar chooses make itself known.

Another aspect of it will be what the choice of a particular form can impart. If we try and restrict what shape a familiar might be acceptable to us, in some ways this risks restricting what gifts they have to give and the flow of the Otherworld across the bridge. If we are rather uncomfortable with the idea of our familiar looking anything other than like a cat or dog or toad or bird, then we might be limiting ourselves in some ways and denying what a familiar taking on the appearance of a dragon or John Dee or even Captain Jack Sparrow could be capable of doing for us. Which isn’t to say that a familiar can’t appear as a bird or a cat or a dog, but that possibilities are limitless and should be allowed to take their natural course.

Far better to focus on strengthening that relationship, whatever form it ends up taking, and seeing where it will lead and what it can teach us. It does little good to spend valuable time worrying about what is acceptable or normal, either to society at large or even to fellow Witches who might look askew at the idea of having, for example, a spirit familiar taking on the appearance of a cartoon character. After all, Bugs Bunny

is a powerful, smart, and immensely cunning being and always seems to get his way, so who better to have on your side in a pinch.

Basically, the heroes and sacred creatures of the past still exist today, though the medium has changed from oral stories to that of print and screen, in particular those found in fantasy and science fiction. For, like Witchcraft, fantasy and science fiction expands the mind and opens the door to belief in other realities, or at least the potential of belief in other realities. As much as ritual, anything that can allow for experiences of other realms aids us in being able to go farther in our Craft and thus to achieve more power and knowledge. Witches exist and need to exist on the cutting edge of what is, what was, and what might be and familiar spirits, no matter what mask they wear, are an intrinsic part of that exploration.

We all walk where we will walk, where we are needed to walk, just as the Witches of the past did. No Witch walks alone, even those who practice in solitude, in part because Witches create bridges between themselves and those beings of Other. Witches touch the realm of infinite possibility known as Faery and Faery touches the Witch in return. No Witch is ever the same for it. Each of us can potentially have a veritable host backing us up, intimate and personal connections that can help in creating a circuit of magickal energy between this world and that of the Otherworld, a rising whirlwind of power that can work marvels.

(Endnotes)

- a ¹ John Taylor, *The Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut*, New York, p. 81
- b ² Edward Fairfax, *Demonologia*, Harrogate, 1882, p. 32.
- c ³ Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1973, p. 156.
- d ⁴ Thomas Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, Edinburgh, 1833, pp. 606, 614.
- e ⁵ George Giffard, *Discourse of the Subtill Practises of Devilles*, London, 1587, p. 18.
- f ⁶ T.D. Whitaker, *History of Whalley*, London, 1818, p. 216.

DOES A SYSTEM OF CHAKRAS EXIST IN TRADITIONAL WITCHCRAFT?

By Radomir Ristic

Although the title of this article could suggest that we are stepping into the soil of speculation or maybe into the New Age quagmire, which has no final border, the actual intent is to talk about a very serious issue, and something of note that we encountered last year.

Everything began when a friend of mine asked me to send him several interesting healing incantations, which I have been collecting for some time. He wanted ones which were not meant for a specific disease, but for the human body in general, and of course, he didn't want newly-written ones, but old traditional ones.

There are countless examples of these incantations in the Balkans. Scholars first began to collect them during the Romantic Period in the 19th century. The most famous ones among them were Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic and Radovan N. Kazimirovic. Later this task was continued by the first generations of Serbian ethnologists and that is the situation today. Modern anthropologists say that these incantations are "basme" and they are a common part of "bajanja" (spellcraft). They define "bajanje" as: "An archaic survival of folk magic medicine and magic in general. They are a secret protection against evil demons, spirits, ghosts, demons of illness etc. using incantations and magic items."^a

An anthropologist's definition of Incantations or "basme" from Serbia is:

"Archaic folk poetry or prose, which magic practitioners chant during magic rituals".^b

The name for someone who chants them is "Bajalica" - in translation, "Spell Speaker" - or "Vracar-Vracara" - in translation, "Cunning man or woman" - or "Vestica" - in translation, "Witch". The names are countless too.

Modern common people in Serbia call these incantations "bajalice", an old name for the people who chanted them in earlier times, in one specific region of the country. Scholars consider this to be incorrect.

All these incantations have a similar structure, as we have had the opportunity to see in previous issues of *The Crooked Path Journal*. But additionally, almost all of them have one other thing in common. This thing is that very often they have strange lines in their texts with unknown meaning, even for those using them. The reason for this is that they are very old - some of them date from the Middle Ages - and all of them have been passed on orally, and over the centuries their original meanings have been lost. But they are preserved and are in use even today. So we can continue to collect them and try to find their true meaning through anthropological methodology and analysis. This is important because in them we can find the old Gods, faeries, Old Spirits, Christian saints, and saints which do not exist in Christianity, in one place.

This means that over the centuries, some changes were caused by the influence of Christianity and the Bogumils, but their structure stayed intact, and with analysis we can even reconstruct who or what has been replaced by a Christian saint or some other character from Christianity. We can do that by researching the character of the Saint

in the folk belief system - how do they describe him, and what is he the protector of? Then we would look for a deity or some great spirit from folk paganism that played a similar role in the old days. This kind of syncretism is common worldwide.

When I started to choose which incantations to send him, I noticed one with a very interesting text. It was from east Serbia, and I know that the first person who wrote it down was Radovan N. Kazimirovic, which means that it was collected somewhere between 1920 and 1930 in the village of Jabukovac, as he personally claims in his book. A witch would chant this incantation while mixing water in a gourd with a small bouquet of sweet basil which would be tied up with red thread. After that she would give the water to the patient to drink a little of, and after that to wash himself with it. In Serbian it sounds like this:

Prošlo je 40 devojčica sa 40 metlica,
Prošlo je 40 dečice sa 40 lopatice,
Prošlo je 40 nevesta sa 40 metlica.
Kuda su pošli?
Pošli su na vrh planina,
Ka vilinskim izvorima,
Da očiste, da uredi I izvore otvore,
Milostive majke sa 40 devojčica,
40 metlica,
40 dečice I četrdeset lopatice,
Sa 40 nevesta I 40 metlica,
Kako ste znali da očistite I otvorite vilinske izvore,
Tako da saznate za lek (ime I prezime bolesnog),
Da ga potražite,
Da pređete preko zelenih livada,
Preko cvetnih polja,
Preko bistrih voda,
Preko rasturenog kamenja,
Preko odronjenih brda,
Lek da nađete I ovu vodu(nad kojom se baje), da stavite I (ime I prezime
bolesnog) izlečite I očistite, od svake bolesti, od svakog nagažavanja, od svake
teškoće, I da ostane čist I svetao,,
Kao zvezda na nebu,
Kao rosa u polju,
Kao Sunce kad se rađa,
Kao zora kad se javi,
Kao Majka Prečista kad je zemlji Hrista rodila.^c

In English it looks like this:

There went by 40 girls with 40 besoms,
There went by 40 children with 40 shovels,
There went by 40 brides with 40 besoms.
Where did they go to?
They went to climb the top of the mountains,
To fairy's springs,
To clean and to fix and to open springs,
Merciful mothers with 40 girls,
40 besoms,
40 children and 40 shovels,
With 40 brides and 40 besoms,
How did you know how to clean and open fairy's springs,
So that you can find out about the medicine (name and surname of the sick person),
To look for him,
To cross over green fields,
Over flower scopes,
Over clear waters,
Over broken stones,
Over boulders,
To find the cure in this water (one used in the rite), to make (name and surname of the sick person) healed and clean, from every trouble, from every magic, from every difficulty, and so that he remains clean and bright,
Like the star in the sky,
Like the frost in the field,
Like the sun when it's being born,
Like the dawn when it occurs,
Like the God Mother when she had the Christ born.^d

Two things grab our attention. The first one is the constant repetition of the number 40. The second one is the mention of "Fairy springs". It is quite obvious that there are 40 "Fairy springs" in the human body, too. "Mountain" could be a metaphor for the human body, but that is not essential. As we can see in this chant, those little girls, children and brides, clean the "Fairy springs" and open them to work properly. The final goal is hidden in these words; "How did you know how to clean and open the fairy springs, so that you can find out about the medicine" and; "To find the cure in this water, to make him healed and clean, from every trouble...". From this we can conclude that if they can clean and open "Fairy springs" in the mountain, they could

do the same thing with the human body. They could put this cure in the enchanted water, and it would do the same thing. It will clean and open 40 “Fairy springs” in the human body.

Everybody who works with analyses of old folk incantations knows that nothing in them is perchance. When we work with incantations, which should be compiled in accordance with magical rules, we already know that the most common system of compilation is “like causes like”. So if you find in chants that the mountain has 40 “Fairy springs”, that means that human body must have 40 “Fairy springs” too. This is the point - the chant is not about the mountain, it is about curing the human body. So if somebody in an incantation can clean and open 40 “Fairy springs” in the mountain, that means that they can clean and open 40 “Fairy springs” in the human body. Of course that mountain with 40 springs does not exist in reality and was just mentioned as an allegory. So everything is very easy to understand.

All of this should mean that the human body should have some areas or zones which are crucial for human health. The number of these zones is 40, and their name in Serbian Witchcraft is “Fairy springs”. This looks very much like the Indian system of “chakras” or the Chinese “gates of chi”. The question is, what is a system of chakras doing in Traditional Witchcraft? I presumed that it wasn’t imported from India, China, Japan etc.

So I started to think about what was familiar to me in that chant. I never heard of “Fairy springs” in this context, but, number 40 was familiar to me as well as 41. Actually I have heard about these two numbers in two different areas which are a common part of Serbian Crafting. The first one is Herbal Lore and second one is from a divination method.

In many recipes from Herbal Lore, witches advise you to put 40 items from one single or forty different plants in brandy or something similar if you want to make a cure. However, some of them will insist that you must use 41 if you want good results. A classical example of this is a recipe for rheumatism that I have collected in the village of Djindjusa. Grandmother Ratka, from that village, told me that the best cure for rheumatism could be made if someone put 40 plum stones into a bottle of brandy. Then that person should put the bottle in the Sun and wait for 40 days. After that they can use the brandy for massaging areas of the body which are in pain. She insists that there must be 40 plum stones or the cure won’t work.^c

The most commonly used divination method in the Balkan region is “Reading the beans”. The procedure works like this. It is necessary to take forty-one grains that must be brought close to the mouth, and chant an incantation whose end must be formulated as a question. It looks like this:

“Forty one grains, forty one brothers and sisters, as you know to germinate, to grow and to feed people, so you must know, when will J. Doe marry (for example)?”

After this the grains are thrown on some flat surface, like a table or tray, or something similar, and then the grains must be observed. In essence, the most important thing is the way the grains group. More piles of three or four grains always mean good result. Many standalone grains that do not touch adjacent ones represent negativity or it means that wish will not come true. The same thing goes for piles of two grains. It is necessary to notice the piles that have most grains.^f

However, some witches use 40 grains and their incantation is about 40 grain and 40 brothers and sisters. Usually which incantation they will use depends on which part of Country they are from. But again we have the numbers 41 or 40.

It is obvious that there is some disagreement about which number is correct, and it is equally obvious that both of these numbers are from the same source, and that they are mentioned in the same story or myth which those witches follow.

Because I already knew that Balkan Traditional Witchcraft is mixture of old solitary shamanistic practice and methodology of work and heretical Christianity, and that it came into maturity in the middle ages under the great influence of the Balkan Gnostics and heretics, the Bogumils, I started to read all that I could find of their myths. That turned out to be an inspired move. I have found the following myth:

“After God created man from dirt, He left him to dry in the Sun and went to get a living spirit which would help him to come to life. Seeing this, the Devil drilled **41** holes in the figure made of dirt out of envy. When God returned and blew in Adam’s nostrils the spirit went out. When God saw that he took **40** herbs and clogged **40 of the** holes, leaving one hole for the soul to slowly go out and the man to be able to die. Then God spoke to the man and told him that these herbs are very good for healing and that each herb heals some part of the body.”^g

After this story, the story teller wrote about how the first people knew those plants, but each generation after them slowly forgot which plants they were. However, there is one more myth from the XVI century which tells of a similar story. The only differences is that when God saw that the Devil had drilled **41** holes in the human body, he upturned the body and left the holes inside it. After that the Devil said to God that when man gets the pains he will remember the God.^h

We can assume that there are many more myths with similar stories but we couldn’t find them. Additionally we know that there can be many variations at a local level as well. However, as we can see in the first myth, there is mention of both of the numbers which are important to us. That is enough for us. So what we can say about them?

First of all, one more time we were able to show that dominant myths in Balkan Crafting are from heretical Christianity, or Gnosticism if you want, and that people who deal with magic and perform old shamanistic rituals have adopted them. That is how Witchcraft was born in the Balkans. The second important thing is that we clearly can see that this myth is auto-chthonic and that it was not imported from the Far East. In it we can see that God created man but that the Devil is responsible for 41 holes in the human body. Beside that we can see that these holes are connected with certain plants and it is no wonder that they are present in Herbal Lore and divination rituals in which plant use is necessary. Also we can see the reason why some witches use 40 and others 41. Those who use number 41 quite obviously want to trick God's will and heal the 41st hole, or their teaching is from the second myth in which God didn't treat any hole differently. We know for sure that that one hole in Balkan Craft is the mouth. By many Balkan myths and proverbs, the human soul comes out of the body through the mouth. These beliefs are closely connected with the "last breath". Likewise in many parts of the Balkans people believe that shamans and witches leave their body through the mouth after getting into trance, in the shape of some small animal. These animals represent their souls and essences.

The crucial question here is - can we see these 41 holes as chakras? Our personal opinion is that we should look at them as chakras. Firstly, in the first myth we can see that they are connected with human health. The human soul or spirit can leave the body through them and a man could die because of their existence. Because of them, or at least one of them, man is not immortal. Indirectly we can conclude that God's spirit is some kind of force or energy in our body. If any of those holes are not "sealed" properly or if they are not in good shape, the person could become ill. If everything is ok with them and only one is opened then the life forces will slowly escape the body and the man will die as an old man, but he will die. So they are connected with God's spirit or energy in our body. We can see that they are gates through which energy that God gave to us leaves the body. In addition, we discover that people should treat them with the correct plants. This indirectly tells us again that they are responsible for our health. Secondly, as we all know, we don't have 40 holes in our body which we can see. This could mean that they became invisible to the human eye after God sealed them with the plants. From the second myth, we can't see them because they are inside the human body after God's intervention.

In the incantation we have the opportunity to see that they have a name, and that this name is "Fairy springs". We can also see that a person can treat them in a magical way by using spells for finding the cure, which will be put in the water (of course nothing material would be put in the water except witch's own "words" or "intention") and empowers the water itself. We learned that "Fairy springs" could be cleaned, fixed and opened. This is very important too, because Indian healers use very similar terminology for chakras treatments. In the end we have the opportunity to see that after treatment,

the person will be healed and cleansed, from every disease, from every magic and from every difficulty. This is very interesting and we can conclude that by treating “Fairy springs” in the human body we can do much more than recover our physical health. It is quite obvious that in this way we can remove evil magic or affect a bad situation in our life, or psychic problems - which the word “difficulty” in the Serbian language can also imply. This is a very interesting concept too, which is consistent with many observations in present-day occult societies, and some old traditions as well, in which they look on evil magic and difficulties in people’s lives as an energy with “negative information”. This quantum of negative energy can be sent to us by others or we can bring it to our life by ourselves with negative thoughts or with some dangerous behavior, purposely or accidentally. The Bottom line is that energy is everywhere and it is everything, so everything that happens influence us. Quantum physic has proven that like attracts like.

Because of all of this we think that a system of chakras exists in Traditional Witchcraft, but its concept is significantly different from that of India or China. Unfortunately we didn’t find anything more about these 40 spots in the human body, or “Fairy springs”, and we do not know where precisely they are. However this summer we have plans to do more research in the field, and we will try to find out something more about them and where they are. If we do, you will be the first to know.

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(Endnotes)

- a Kulisic, Petrovic, Pantelic, “Srpski mitoloski recnik” (Serbian mythological dictionary), Belgrade 1998, pp.,25.
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- c Radovan N. Kazimirovic, “Tajanstvene pojave u nasem narodu” (Mystery events in our people), Decje novine, Beograd, 2000, reprint from 1931, pp.137-138.
- d Translation by Stanislava Vucicevic
- e My field research from south of Serbia (23.7.1999-28.7.1999).
- f This divination method as we know was first time written by Kazimirovic, too. Ibid, pp.244-248.
- g P.Kemp, “Balkanski kultovi”, Luta, Beograd 2000, pp. 23-24. You can find this book in English under the following name; P.Kemp, “Healing Ritual: Studies in the Technique and Tradition of the Southern Slavs”, Faber and Faber Limited, 1935.
- h I. Ivanov, “Bogumilski knigi I legendi”, Sofia, 1925, pp.336.

THE FIRE BRAND AND THE SILVER SIREAD: A DISCOURSE ON INITIATION IN TRADITIONAL CRAFT AND CLAIMS OF LINEAGE

By Robin Artisson

I thought I might take some time out today to write a short discourse regarding the nature of “Initiation” in Traditional Craft currents and recensions.

A very astute modern occultist that I had the pleasure of corresponding with once described the act of initiating another person through formal rite as “Passing the Fire Brand of Tubal Cain” or “Passing the Fire Brand of Tubalo-Lucifer”.

These are powerful words, for they sum up an important and essential strand buried in lineal initiation- passing power from one person to another. This “power” is the fire or force of the primordial awakening of mankind to its magical and mystical self-awareness, the “Great Inheritance” given by the Witch-Sire.

It is poetically referred to as a “brand” or a “flaming brand”, and these are powerful metaphors- for it was a gift of fire, so goes the common mythological account, that the Great Teacher of mankind bestowed upon mankind, for good and for ill. Fire becomes the symbol for Spirit’s presence in humans, just as it is a common worldwide symbol for the presence of a God or Divinity upon an altar or in a sanctuary. The “flaming brand” or the “flaming torch” is an emblem for the fiery quality of spirit, embodied in a tangible yet subtle power-presence that lives in the members of any legitimate tradition.

The Gift of the Witch-Sire

The true “home” of this power is of course nowhere and everywhere; it is a power that fills the weave of Fate, and it finds ports of more specific expression in the awakened minds and bodies of people who participate in “tradition”- so long as they are exposed to it, usually via ritual initiation. This “gift of the Gods” was taken from “heaven”- or from the Shining Realms above, before it made its descent into the earth of human existence. All of matter was “consecrated” by it, including proto-humanity.

As I have long maintained, this story of “consecration” can be taken on several levels- for humans, the inner truth of this consecration deals more with a dawning awareness on their part that Spirit is a reality within themselves and all things, not so much a “gift from the outside” which became bestowed on dull, spiritless matter.

All the same, the subjective experience of the awakening to Spirit does include, to the mind that beholds it with wonder, a feeling of something very powerful coming from “outside”- though this is only a matter of perception. The Witch-Sire awakened man and woman to a force that was always present- but at this primordial awakening, more

than just mental changes occurred- all things changed. The reality of the human world changed; blood and body changed. Inner changes are followed closely on the outside by outer changes, and we are dealing with a unified reality, in which mind is far more a part of what we describe as “outer” or “empirical” than almost anyone realizes.

The Master or Witch-Sire who bestowed this splendid and precious “seal” or Gift upon mankind is named Tubal-Cain or Tubalo-Lucifer by some- Naturally, Tubal Cain is not only the first blacksmith from the Old Testament, but the name for an eastern cultural divinity of Smithcraft. He is a hypostasis of the “crafting spirit” of common human mystical experience- named Vulcan and Tubalo by others, Wayland and Azazel in other places. Azazel or Azael is important in this talk, because in Semitic daimonology, he was the “Goat Lord” who not only led the hosts of the “Watchers” or the “Sons of God” down to the Earth to mingle their undying spirit-seeds with the “daughters of men”, but Azael, in the Book of Enoch, teaches mankind the art of smithing. He is a “Luciferian” hero, of the Prometheus type. He is also (as both Azael and Lucifer) a common figure in Traditional Craft circles and traditions.

The Ages of the World and the Secret Flame

It seems like the ages of the world pass, and things gradually become dull, and fall apart. All ancient Indo-European and Aryan wisdom traditions agree to this; the Golden Age of the beginning gives way to lesser ages, finally arriving at last to the terminal age of any universe-cycle, wherein humans will be short-lived, weak, unable to perform the miracles and mystical feats that were so common in earlier ages, and the world, eaten apart by strife, will finally fall apart, to return to the “Night of the Gods” or the Sleep of the Cosmos, awaiting regeneration.

Greek lore and Vedic/Hindu lore both have detailed descriptions of the various “ages” of man, and the waning of the world. In fact, the Hindu belief is that we are currently in the “Kali-Yuga”, the age of strife where the Dark Goddess is preparing to devour and destroy the world; for them, these are the “last days”. The christian belief in the impending apocalypse comes directly from this common Indo-European pagan belief, which is as old as the hills- even the Norse believed that the Age of Ragnarok would be known by a time where families turned against each other, and killed one another, and social ties (and the traditional ties of their kin-based society) would break down. They called it the “Wolf Age”, referring to the mighty Fenris who would herald the coming of the final world-doom. They also called it a “Wind Age” and a “Sword Age” to refer to the worldwide violence that would be common.

A fine North American example of this common ancient wisdom is found among the Lakota Sioux, who believe that a Buffalo stands “far to the west”, and holds back the waters that will one day overwhelm the world. They believe that as the ages of the world pass, he loses hair, teeth, and even body parts, and one day he will die, and the

waters will overwhelm all. This will of course be the end of all, and it will set the stage for the rebirth of all, for the Sioux believe, in common with almost all ancient human cultures, that the world emerged from a primordial ocean. It should be noted that according to the Sioux, the Buffalo currently has no hair, only one tooth, and balances precariously on only one leg, having lost the other three to the ravages of time.

In a time of increasing violence, dullness, materiality, and loss of wisdom, the primordial gift of the Witch-Sire becomes eroded. The Fire once lit in mankind becomes dim, and very few are those who still possess it enough to feel its power, or to use this power to creatively interact with the world- to influence the world towards wise ends, or to simply realize the light of truth in a darkening world.

Witch-Traditions and other mystical traditions, currents, and recensions, especially those that deal with the “passing of the brand” are attempting, through mytho-poetic power and actual spiritual experience/questing, to keep the “flame” alive in a world that is making it harder and harder to burn. The artists, the mystics, the poets, they have (and always have had) the “fire”- once, if we are to believe, that fire burned brightly in many, and true kingships and rulership was based on it. Wisdom traditions today only maintain dim hints and remains of what was once a cohesive and universal understanding of the mystery of Spirit.

Of course, as the ages of the world come and go, and we move closer to the final darkness that awaits, even the poets and artists and mystics have a harder and harder time accessing the gift that calls to them so much- Sioux shamans in North America talk about a former age when shamans needed no drums nor sacred hallucinogenic plants to achieve trance states and visions, a time when they came with total ease and with great power.

Legitimate “witch” traditions, in common with all genuine transmissions of the pneumatic/psychosomatic Mystical Flame-Numina of the Primordial Firebringer or Lightbringer, are all “survivals”, into the modern day, of an ancient theme, and an ancient mytho-poetic reality: a reality that manifests itself as creativity, true imagination, and inspiration- these things are all “messengers”, manifestations of the undying and the Spiritual, the immortal, the divine. These things have been the driving force behind human progress and insight. They have changed our world, and we have used them to create the world in our own image, as much creators of our world as they say the Gods created us.

Do not ever forget that the underlying force behind creativity, imagination, and inspiration is the very essential reality of the Gods- the Fiery Brand is pure spirit, the “highest good”, the stone of the philosophers. It is the goal of all mystical endeavor and that to which all human spiritual questing inclines. It is a gift that dwells at the very dimmest levels now inside of all mankind, and the “traditions” who “pass this power”

to members in its lineage are passing a power that “raises” the fire in the recipient, making them more spiritually aware, making them more aware of the undying within themselves and all things, and making them more capable of acts of creativity and imagination- the most extreme of which are called “magic”.

Those who are already naturally inspired, capable of feats of true artistry and divine imagination are already members of the “House of Cain” and already bear his refulgent mark; this is a common belief among many practitioners of Traditional Craft.

Initiation and the Hidden Roots

Where do the traditions that exist today come from? Where do they “get” a tiny bit of fire from that brand, before preserving it, enshrining it, protecting it, and attempting to pass it along to others?

Power must be passed in a formal Craft initiation, or there is no initiation to speak of. All currents of Magistry or Mastery, all currents of occult understanding, all mystical currents or “threads of Fate” that serve the unfolding of spiritual awareness in man, and which manifest in the familiar forms of religion, cult, or tradition, had to “come from somewhere”, in the sense that all have to have a “genesis” point here in serial time, in linear history.

This discourse intends to focus on the feature of “passing power” or “passing the fire-brand” in certain initiations. Of course, initiation itself is a very broad subject, but it comes down to one central core- the entry of a person into a mystery, and the reciprocal entry of that mystery into the person, who then becomes an initiate.

There is a mystery of fire, a mystery of Spirit, which we have been discussing- and that can be “passed into a person” through a legitimate initiation, whereby the person then unavoidably “passes into the mystery”; this reciprocity must occur, for there are no one-sided coins! When two things meet, they experience each other, they change each other.

The Fire Brand changes the person, and the person changes it- each person who enters into a tradition and partakes of its mystery changes the expression of that mystery, mingling their own personal insights, ideas, thoughts, dreams, and other fateful individual qualities. Traditions change over time through the inclusion of new members and the Fated tides of events that affect them. The immortal fire remains within, however, perpetually illuminating the changeful tides of time and person, always the same, yet always changing- a true divine paradox. This is captured in an ancient prayer directed to the Witch-sire which goes:

**“Hail, Earendel, brightest of beings thou, sent to men upon this earth!
Thou art the true refulgence of the sun, radiant above the stars, and you
illuminate forever all the tides of time.”**

But now back to my question- where do traditions “get” the power they pass? The people involved in most modern “traditions” want to say the obvious answer- that they derive their fire-gnosis or spiritual “descent” from an unbroken chain of persons from the past, stretching back to the primordial divine descent of light and spirit into mankind. Some DO make this claim, but without a touch more elucidation of the importance of mytho-poetics, we may never understand why they do.

Mythical History and Mytho-Poetics

A tradition is the manifestation of a spiritual current; it is a formal practice, engaging in some form of rote action, understanding, or working that preserves the message or spirit of a current. Civic customs and traditions like Christmas, complete with its decorated Christmas trees and gift-giving, are good surface-level examples.

Few families practice identical Christmas traditions or customs; everyone has their own manner of celebrating Christmas. But there are common themes to all- candles, Christmas trees, Christmas Eve vigils, Christmas carols, a shared meal or Christmas Dinner, presents, and the like. These “themes” are rote- they are done every year at the same time by the family. All of these practices are manifestations of the underlying spirit of Christmas- renewing family ties, sharing, mirth and plenty, putting aside differences, and the rebirth of a new time, a new year, a new cheer, embodied in the birth of the miraculous Christ-child.

These are all very old impulses- both the German and Celtic pagans had festivals for the darkest depths of winter that dealt with re-fixing the bonds of kinship and community, and celebrating the time when the powers of summer or light would begin to gradually return to the world, a triumph, even in darkness, of life. Historians and modern pagans have beaten to death the idea that many European pagan cultural gods of light were born on or about the Winter Solstice, December 20-25th; there is no reason to go into that here.

A mystical tradition is just like what was described above, in many respects. The underlying spirit or current of the tradition is manifested in practices that are shared on some level by the people who maintain the tradition, who act as its messengers and tide-bearers. After a long time, and the spread of a tradition to many, many people, not all members of a tradition may do things precisely alike, but all follow roughly the same pattern, and the current is maintained.

Part of any mystical or religious tradition is the presence of mytho-poetic history. This is a very poorly understood thing in the modern world, and less so in the modern mystical world, filled as it is by pretenders who are always making ostentatious and absurd claims to follow an “unbroken” spiritual tradition that is “from the priests and priestesses of Atlantis” and the like.

What few people understand- even those who tend to make these claims- is that mythical history is crucial to a spiritual tradition. Mythical or poetic history does not need to be physically, historically “true” for it to be effective to the members of a tradition. No one alive on the planet today can claim to belong to an unbroken transmission of the “Fire” that goes back ALL the way, from one person to the next, to the dawn of time, to the very moment when the Witch-Sire bestowed his divine gift on man.

All the same, there are people who make just that claim. One group is very well known for their version of it- the Catholic church. The Catholic church insists on its own myth that its priests have all been given “holy orders” or initiation into the priesthood by bishops who themselves were made bishops by men who had received authority directly from other men who had an unbroken “apostolic lineage” back to the apostles of Christ, who had received their authority straight from Jesus, and therefore from God himself.

The Mormon church makes similar claims- not only are the founders of their church said to have received “keys” or authority directly from the original apostles (via an angel that appeared to them in the late 1800’s) but they regularly claim that members of their church can genealogically trace their family lines directly back to Adam and Eve, and therefore to God.

Why do people do this? For a very important reason- because doing so internally and spiritually “situates” them in the mythical reality that they believe in, and are trying to actualize within themselves; a mythical reality that they are trying to express in “outward” time and in manifestation.

“Situating” themselves in this way makes them deeply receptive to the spirit or divine reality that they most firmly believe in. Of course, in the case of monolithic organizations such as the Catholic church, which has centuries of political darkness and manipulation behind it, such mytho-poetic stories- which were presented as straight historical fact- were used to give them an unquestionable authority in the eyes of the common people.

This is the key to the whole matter- there is no wrong in a group or a person or a tradition that makes fabulous claims of spiritual descent- the wrong begins when these people present the mythical history and the “outward” history as being one and the same. For too long, this has been done to gain a “legitimacy” that was used to

manipulate people. True “legitimacy” comes FROM the inner level or from spirit; it needs no “outward” truth or linear fact of history to justify it.

History is nine parts fiction, to begin with- it is very vulnerable to the manipulations and “accommodations” of powerful people. History is not the “hard and true” science that most people try to make it into, or dearly want to believe it is; history is all interpretive and very much up for question.

What is not up for question, however, is the internal experience and life of a person, or even the inner life of a legitimate tradition; these things are experiential only, and they have the possibility of representing a truth which is atemporal and ever-present. Initiation gives the possibility of “bringing” outsiders into the mythical dimension as embodied by whatever tradition is in question.

All occult traditions from history tend to have “mythical history” that they induct their members into- the Masons are a fine example. Though Masonry only physically and historically had its beginning in the 17th century (according to most), Masons are initiated and taught that their tradition goes back to the time of the building of Solomon’s Temple, and that the first masons were the builders of that temple. Some take this esoteric lineage back further, even to the time of the legendary Hermes Trismegistus and the Emerald Tablet.

There is no foul here- such mytho-poetics are central and important to the current embodied by Masonry. The initiates have to “put themselves in” the mythical time of the mythical founders, have to assume the role of martyred Hiram Abiff, the legendary first Mason, and live the spiritual power of this myth. This is central to their mystical understanding and their initiation. But it is not meant to be taken as a literal historical truth, even if it may have elements of historical truth. The historical aspects of the myth are secondary to the experience, on the inner level, of what truth the Myth contains.

Mature occultists, as well as genuine members of legitimate traditions, will understand all that I have said here, and though they may firmly believe in their mythical history, they will not conflate the myth with the dull, spiritless fiction of linear time and serial history. There is simply no need to do so- and those who do it tend to be motivated by very dark reasons indeed. Most of the time they wish to lay claim to some “authority” which exists only in their own minds and the minds of the gullible that may be ensnared by whatever glamour they command. This spurious “authority” they may eke from the praises or weak wills of others is only dust, from the perspective of the authentic and the timeless.

A celebrated occultist and traditional practitioner from Britain, with whom I corresponded, summed all this up best when he wrote:

“I think the tales told about “Traditional Witchcraft” ‘lineages’ and ‘covens’... from the viewpoint of historical fact, are very palpable fictions, but regarded with the eye of imagination and vision they are ‘accommodations of desire’, repositories of magical Faith and therefore a vital means of ‘enlinkment’ with the noetic realities such symbols shadow...sometimes truth comes to us in the form of an illusion... the legerdemains and sleight-of-perception characteristic of our Master (the Witch God).”

The Red Snake and the Red Thread

In a certain stream of Buckinghamshire Craft, a term is used to refer to the blood-lineage of persons who are initiated- “The Red Snake”. This “Red Snake” also refers to the whole of the tradition, along with its methods and ritual practices. This term is believed by me to be related to the notion of the “Red Thread”, but with some differences.

“The Red Thread” refers to a “Thread” of Fate itself, spun or woven by the Fate-Mother who stands behind all occurrences and all reality. This “red” Thread is the mystical thread, woven through reality, which manifests itself in all times and places in mystical activity, religion, and magic. Any spiritually active “group” or tradition is already a part of the “Red Thread” in the broadest sense. However, the “Red Thread” can also refer to the thread of blood, a genetic thread that goes back to the Bloodmother or Witchmother herself, a sort of feminine parallel to the “Fire Brand” or spiritual line that goes back to the Witch-Sire. This “Fire” and “Blood-thread” are two crucial factors that link us directly to the Gods, making us their children on every level.

In some cases, as with the “Red Snake”, the Red Thread refers to the blood-lineage of people who have lineal initiation from a certain craft-tradition. These different understandings of the “red line” are important before we continue on to the idea of the “Silver Thread”.

The Silver Thread

Not all initiations occur at the hands of other human beings. Since time immemorial, mystically aware people have recognized that the spirits or Gods themselves can effectively initiate people, via otherworldly or Innerworldly experiences. Some traditional crafters refer to this form of initiation as “Midnight’s Lightning” or the “Lightning at Midnight”- a sudden emergence of spirit into the night of time, or into the mortal life of the initiate.

Ancient Greece gives us one of the first recorded mentions of a person who underwent an initiation at the hands of the Gods. A man had a dream that he was being initiated into the famous Eleusinian mysteries, whose content was a highly guarded secret. Any initiate at Eleusis who revealed the secret of the initiation could be executed or exiled by civil law. The man who had the dream wanted to verify whether or not he had truly seen the secret of the initiation, so he asked an initiate, who only nodded “yes” to him, to verify the dream.

The man who nodded “yes” was (amazingly) put on trial for revealing the secret, simply through verifying it to the man who asked- but he was saved from death or penalty when his defender pointed out that the Gods themselves had initiated the man who had asked the question; they (the Gods) had acted as torch-bearers and as the hierophant in his dream, or there would have been no way he could have known the secret. The Athenian judging panel agreed.

As I said above, the “lightning bolt at midnight”, or a vision, can act as a portal for initiation- and lineages are sometimes formed from these “unique transmissions”, as long as the transmission of power/insight from the otherworldly beings to the person hit by their lightning is strong enough (and as long as it is Fatefully intended) to move from the person who was initiated in vision, onto others. The “thread” of such a “lineage” is called by some a “Silver Thread”.

A Traditional Witch from England included this statement, in a letter he wrote to me:

“The Unique Transmission is Old Fate’s blessing... it is a secret rapport between the Gods and the Soul; no other may tell of it. Its outward signs are inspiration and knowing, married in an indefinable state whereby a man becomes Mage.”

Another term used by some Traditionals- “The Lonely Road”- refers to the path walked by those who have received an individual or unique “initiation” from the great powers, and who belong to a “tradition” of one person- themselves. If this initiation is in fact a new dispensation of power from the Unseen world, then that person can rightly be referred to as a “Master of the Lonely Road”, and can empower others in the name of that vision, passing the power on just as mentioned before. But there are two very important points that have to be made here.

The first point is that the “experience” and essence of the initiation bestowed by an operating tradition is similar, but NOT the same as the essence of a “Midnight Lightning” initiation.

The same Traditional Craft teacher mentioned before also stated, in an attachment to a letter he sent me:

“It (the Lightning initiation) does not comport the same empowerment as that of formal ritual induction, but then neither does a formal rite carry the same power as a dream wherein one meets with the Gods face-to-face.”

This is a very important thing to remember. Both kinds of initiations have their own place, but both are aiming at the same goal- the opening of the “strong eyes” or the inner eyes by which the face of the mystery can be gazed upon. The mortal eyes in the head cannot do this to the same effect. We are dealing with the dualistic-seeming conflict of the “eyes of fire” and the “eyes of clay”, but to the person who has “seen” the mystery, there is no longer a conflict.

The second point is that a transmission from the Unseen world to a person is via the unbreakable Silver Thread of dream and vision- but when its power is “passed” to another, it becomes “red”. The power takes up residence in the mind and blood of the person it was passed to, and if that person were to pass it on in turn, a blood lineage of transmission is formed. As I discussed above, “Red Thread” has several meanings, and this is one of them. All traditions and lineages of cunning art, craft, power, sorcery or mysticism all have their “beginning” in historical time, in the minds and hands of a person who lived a mortal life.

The Birth of Spiritual Lineage

By arriving here, I have answered the question that the latter half of this essay was intended to answer- where does it all come from? We know the mythical history- “it”, the spiritual power of Tradition, comes from the Witch-Gods or the Spirits; it comes from the Firebringer/Lucifer who bestowed primal gnosis on infant mankind; it comes from the Witchmother who used her seductive power to bring people to the depths of her womb, into her shadowy kingdom, and into the blood-filled skull cups or cauldrons of initiation to find true wisdom.

But eventually, at some historical point, humans who were able, on some level, to contact the ever-living presence of mythical reality “channeled” or mediated that force into historical time, via their own vision-won knowledge, and passed this mediated power to others.

When and where these various “historical genesis points” occurred is always up for debate, but I am so bold as to say it now- all “Red Thread” traditions began in the subtle light of the silver thread; they all began in the darkest night when the lightning bolt of vision shattered the mortal illusions of some mystically awakened person or persons, and seeded the world with a dispensation of much power and transformation.

From that point, a lineage can easily form- and some can be VERY long. The lineages that make the claims of longest “unbroken” chain tend to be unwilling to provide

any evidence for their claim, but at final analysis, such claims are secondary to the underlying spiritual reality that empowers any authentic transmission of power.

Sometimes, a current or traditional expression of spiritual force that entered the world in times before can be “lost” or broken up in serial time, in historical time, but “re-emerge” or undergo a recension through a mysterious process that is completely akin to the “lightning bolt” concept.

This is, in fact, the notion of spiritual recension- all traditions that have passed into the Innerworlds leave behind certain “remains”. Mystically-rooted traditions leave mythological, folkloric, and even archeological clues behind, testifying to their original presence on earth, and when the proper spiritual insight is coupled with an inspired appraisal of those “remains”, the current can “revivify” itself, through the person or persons responsible, a true act of traditional “necromancy”, or summoning the Ancestors- calling forth the poetic and impulse-remains of the dead, and putting “red on the bones” so that their ancient wisdom can speak again, in some fashion.

Such “recensions” or inspired recoveries of lore and traditions from the past make up the bulk of “Reconstructionist” pagan religions- but a word of caution is needed here.

Without an implicit trust in the uncanny and unexplainable phenomenon of Spirit, no true recension or spiritually legitimate reconstruction is possible. Many modern Reconstructionists like to play with words and scholarship, but end up isolating themselves from the spirit and meaning that they truly seek. Their focus on historical realities tends to become an over-focus, and they choke out whatever spiritual fertility that these original traditions once enjoyed, in favor of calcified notions. Forgetting that ancient cultures were themselves living and vital, changeful and protean, open to influences that surrounded them, many Reconstructionist efforts become bulwarks of cultish group identity and elitist fantasies. These very same people also tend to accept a very surface-level appraisal of symbolism and the meanings inherent in many historically preserved customs and lore.

Taken together, “reconstructionists” who disparage the spiritual insights of others as so-called “unsubstantiated personal gnosis” fail not only to connect with the vital spirit- the longing for which unconsciously drives most of their own efforts- but they are driven to attack it when they sense it in others. Their sad games played with their preferred interpretations of history and their need to limit others to whatever selective, interpretive definition of “the way it was” that they accept as genuine, reveals the egotistical motivations that threaten even those energetic and scholarly branches of the modern pagan revival. The historical aspect of any tradition is, as I have said before, secondary to the spiritual reality, and those who forget this, always come to taste the dust of their efforts.

Many may wonder at the dangers involved in people having “ideas” or coming up with “teachings” themselves, and starting “lineages” to pass on their notions- some rightly complain about the uncertain nature of “personal gnosis”, and the real and potential danger of a person’s own “hang ups” and ego being involved in what they teach or preach- but never forget this: there is a world of difference between those who create fictions to salve their own egos, or who create flimsy, lifeless teachings, and those who experience a unique transmission of spiritual power or awakening from the Unseen depths of reality.

The only way the two can be told apart is through discrimination on the part of the beholder- the “proof of the pudding”, as they say, “is in the eating”. If you encounter people claiming to be of any “tradition” or “lineage”, or a person claiming to be a guru or a teacher of any kind, you must engage the wits and awareness awakened in you by the ancient Fire-giver, and judge for yourself if what you see and hear bears the “hallmark” of the mystical. If you can be objective, and engage your own feelings and intuitions, you can see the underlying truth of any situation.

There are real lineages out there, functioning to mediate true spiritual power and transformation to people. Some are very old, others not so linearly old, but still possessing strong and authentic transformative ability. All “Traditions” will have equal parts lineage, mythical history, and, somewhere, (whether historically near or far) a Silver Thread that became Red. How honestly the members of the tradition express their understanding of these matters says much in the way of who and what they are, and what spiritual power or wisdom they have access to. What transformations they have brought about in themselves, and what transformations their own “current” can bring about in others also speaks to the legitimacy of the entire matter.

A Fateful Conclusion

As I pointed out above, “The Red Thread”, in its broadest sense, encompasses all mystical occurrences, and occult activities, of any legitimate kind. It does not only refer to traditional lineage or blood, though it includes those as well. When you are dealing with the Red Thread in the greatest sense, you are dealing with a Fate-wide occurrence that includes all human endeavors, all human efforts throughout history, for it was a primal seed-working of true divine magic that made human beings what they are- creatures of fire and clay.

Even though the world-age is gradually coming to its Fateful conclusion, the living and immortal fire and the living blood binds us to the timeless ones, and there are those who will continue, through Fate’s decree, to keep the flame of spirit alive. These

people have no choice in the matter; they do not “do” this through choice as much as the choice to do this makes them what they are, and is a fulfillment of what they are-bearers of the secret fire.

Some people are born with innate understandings of the arcane and the mystical; the ghostly and immortal fire of Bel-Andras or Azael-Lucifer is believed by many to be re-emerging in the genetic and vital upsurge of these persons, born here in Fated time and on Fated threads. The naturally sensitive or mystical may never recognize it, but they are entwined in a thread of red awareness already, established from times long past. They find themselves able to “know without learning” the essence of occult matters, and they know it in such a way that few can understand.

In fairness, the sensitive folk of which I speak tend to understand these matters as little as the next person. The wordless insights that these people experience are common to the scattered members of the universal House of Cain, bearing his invisible mark, but lost in the countless strands of Fate and the tides of earth and time, a precious few diamond-like dust motes glittering among the morass of mud and brick. As the ages come and go, fewer and fewer of these isolated lights shine forth from the mass.

That some are born understanding, and others drawn to know and learn, and others gifted by “lightning from the gods”, and others privileged with initiation, all of these Fated events go back to a central, primordial mystical theme, a mythical history whose golden age all living humans seek as their true home, even if most humans alive in this age of darkness will never be aware of it. Through the darkness of any era, a light beckons, and this inner light sustains us through every trial. From the dawn of time to the dusk of time, it is there, and it remains even when time has passed away.

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EGG-DYEING SECRETS OF THE ELDERS OF PAGANISMAN By Steve Posch

Every year on the Sunday before the vernal equinox, people gather somewhere in the Twin Cities for the great Minnesota egg-dye, as they have every year since 1980. They will dye tens of dozens of eggs, using only natural dyestocks: onion skins, purple cabbage, walnut shells, tumeric. The windows will fog with the steam of the dyepots. Gathered around a long table filled with food, they sing, laugh, and talk. The noise will be almost palpable. No circle is cast, no quarters called. But it is, nonetheless, one of the great collective magical workings of the local year.

Winter in Minnesota is a bleak time, void of color. At the egg-dye the colors of last year's growing season, carefully husbanded, give their hues to hundreds of eggs, the ultimate symbol of spring. (In ancient times, before domestic fowl, spring was the only time of year that there actually were eggs to eat.) Having bridged the grinning gap of winter with last year's colors, we see before our eyes the many colors of the growing season to come. And we are glad, very glad.

And such colors! Rich, deep, gutsy Earth-Mama hues: tribal, complex, never quite pure. Eggs yellow as maple leaves, orange as pumpkins. Eggs red as sunrise, and blue as summer skies. Eggs gray as doves, and brown as good tilled loam. All utterly unlike the pathetic pastels of alien Easters. Colors to call forth spring from winter. Colors to bring the dead to life. Colors whose very making is an act of alchemy.

My grandmother dyed eggs every year with many of the dyes we use today. As did hers before her. And back, and back, as our ancestors have done each year for—arguably—thousands of years. Before the church, before iron. Back when our gods were Sun, and Earth, and Thunder: the great powers on whom our lives depend, as they still do and always will. Back when we knew that only magic can bring back spring. Back when we understood that colored eggs can raise the dead.

And so we do today, and so we shall: and unto ages of ages.

Onion Skins

The best-beloved, most widely-used, and just possibly the oldest of all egg-dyes. Add several handfuls of dried onion skins (either brown, red, or a mixture) to the boiling water while the eggs hard-cook. Depending on cooking time and amount of dyestock used, produces a wide variety of colors, from pale yellow through various shades of orange, to a deep, glossy Minoan red. Skins from either brown or red onions may be used; oddly enough, the type of onion doesn't seem to affect the color produced at all.

Tumeric

For best results, add 2-3 teaspoons tumeric to one quart boiling water. Boil 5 minutes, and strain. Let dye cool, and hard-boil eggs in it. Produces pale to bright yellow.

Purple Cabbage

Chop half a medium purple cabbage coarsely (use all the coarse, outer leaves you can get). Cover with water, and boil one hour or until the color has leached out of the cabbage (the water will be purple and the cabbage pale lavender.) Strain and cool. Cold-dye hard-boiled eggs in the refrigerator overnight. Depending on amount of cabbage used and length of steeping time, produces robin's-egg blue to dark steely grey-

blue. (Oddly enough, this dye only works as a cold-dye. If you try to hot-dye the eggs in it, it has no effect whatsoever. Go figure.)

Walnut Shells

Boil 1 cup crushed walnut shells in one quart water for 1 hour. Strain, cool, and hard-boil eggs in dye. Produces a rich, glossy chocolate brown. This doesn't sound very impressive, but just wait till you see it!

Yerba Maté

Boil ½ cup dried yerba maté leaves in one quart water 1 hour. Strain, cool, and hard-boil eggs in dye. Produces a subtle yellow-green. Particularly effective with brown eggs.

Brazil Wood

Boil 1-2 tablespoons brazil wood powder in one quart water for 1 hour. Strain, cool, and hard-boil eggs in dye. Produces an unbelievable shade of red-blue-purple, not quite magenta.

Hibiscus Flowers

Crush 1-3 tablespoons of dried flowers; boil 1 hour in one quart of water. Strain, cool, and hard-boil eggs in dye. Caution: when removing eggs from dye, do not rinse, and be careful not to rub the dye off (it takes a while to set). Produces anything from lavender to deep purple-brown, depending on amount of dyestock and length of cooking.

Logwood

Boil 1-2 tablespoons logwood powder in one quart water for 1 hour. Strain, cool, and hard-boil eggs in dye. Produces a luscious, glossy royal purple.

Madder Root

Boil ½ handful madder root in one quart water for 1 hour. Strain, cool, and hard-boil eggs in dye. Produces a luscious, glossy royal purple.

General Tips

Colors will vary greatly depending on the potency of the dyestock, amount of dyestock used, and length of dyeing. This is one of the great joys of natural dyeing, but be advised that it's best to be flexible in your expectations.

Most of these dyes will also work well as cold dyes with pre-boiled eggs. The results will generally be paler, but still beautiful.

To avoid cracking, don't put raw eggs directly into boiling dye. Never crowd eggs in the pot, but it's best to dye as many eggs as will comfortably fit into the pot at a time. Eggs are more likely to crack if they have lots of room to move around and bash into one another during the boiling process.

There are lots of other herbal dyes that will color eggs, but in the experience of the Elders of Paganistan, those listed above can be counted on to provide the richest and most beautiful results.

A Happy (and Colorful) Spring!

Poet and storyteller Steven Posch is keeper of the Minnesota Ooser. His CD of original stories, *Radio Paganistan: Folktales of the Urban Witches*, is available from www.omnium.com. He lives and writes in Minneapolis.

SHARAN

By Veronica Cummer

Black fall
Screaming
Yet never to let go
Out of love the earth was rewarded
The honey of the Gods
Heaven's gold
Knowledge and fire
Too extreme to contain.

Blind
The vision burns
The pain rises and slowly recedes
Never to entirely leave
Sulphur and brimstone
No one acknowledged
The gift of the apostles was the same fire
Nor that he was not the enemy
But the same treasure
The magi once sought.

A king for each age
A crown shared
Love takes on many forms
Countless names
First two fishes
Then two candles
The sacrifice continues
The gold of the sun

And the scent of life
The flavor of death
Three gifts
Emblem of a greater truth.

He they feared the most
Is he who is lord at last
As the wheel turns
Not just from life to death
And back to life again
But from one measure to the next
For the ages also transform as they will.

As those anointed by water
Become bathed in flame
The threat of eternal fire
Being but a wicked shadow of the truth
A gift turned inside out
As the lord of light
Of enlightenment
Was made master of lies
And of the ignorant dark
His name reviled
His real nature concealed
The singular star
As it fell
Singing
Pure of love and delight
The burning glory of revelation
Unable to be forgotten
For like all the others
He came out of love
And in love
Was fixed within the hearts of all.

Raise his name
For he is here
And he is now
And this is his time.

THE ORIGIN OF COVEN STRUCTURE

By Radomir Ristic

By many modern, traditionally oriented witches or Wiccans, coven is basic organization, society or alliance of witches. That means that witches perform their practice in company of other witches. One tradition, from Traditional Witchcraft or Wicca, must have at least one coven or it does not exist. It's not unusual that some traditions have several covens or a whole bunch of covens. However, some witches perform their practice alone and common name for them is "solitary witches". But they are not what we are interested in.

Usual terms for coven are; coven, covan and cuveen but also covenant, convent, convene, convention, conventicler etc. Many of those terms imply some kind of gathering. By Judica Illes, word "conventicler" implies only gathering of women.^a

By most of scholars word "coven" has its roots from late medieval Scots word for a gathering of any kind. It is also connected with Medieval Latin "convenium" in translation "agreement" from Latin word "convenire"; in translation "to agree", but also "to come together" or "to gather".^b That word could be also reason for formation of English word "convene". Other scholars claim that in medieval English, this word, have a variant in word "convent" which has its origin in Latin word "conventus", in translation "assembly". It could mean a gathering of people of any kind.

Interesting idea is that word "convent" was used for naming a community of thirteen monks and their abbot which were formatted by model of Christ and his apostles. This word in Scotland from about 1500 was occasionally applied to witch's gatherings. Reason for that can be found in similar sounding word "covin", which was used to describe a plot or a group of plotters.^c Knowing what happened in history and how church described its opponents this scenario for formatting word coven is most likely for us.

As we know the word coven or precisely told "coeven" was first time mentioned in 1662 during the Scottish witch-trail of Isobel Gowdie. She described a coven of 13 members. However some other words were used much before that trail, mainly during the trail to groups of heretics from France-Orleans in 1022, and Italy-Verona in 1175. At that time church still didn't call that people witches but they were accused as a plotters against Christianity, for gathering and performing rituals during the night, heresy etc. Shortly told they were heretics by church's rules and they had group organization but the word coven won't be mentioned until 1662.

This word could be easily forgotten if English Egyptologist Margaret Murray hadn't mentioned it much later. Even further, that word wasn't used until her book was

not published. The book which we are talking about is “The Witch Cult in Western Europe” from 1921.

By her theory covens consisted of 12 witches and a Devil as a leader. He was the 13th member. She claimed that the number was taken as a parody of Christ and his 12 apostles.^d An alternate theory, that further stresses her point of view of a pre-Christian tradition of witches, points out that 13 is the maximum number of dancers that can be accommodated in a nine-foot circle.^e Both theories were rejected by scholars because of lack of evidence and the second one was additionally rejected, but by some modern witches. By our personal opinion her first theory is very close to the truth but there were not any kind of parody of Christianity.

So we identify how word “coven” was born in western world, especially in English language but the question is how coven structure has become an important part of Traditional Witchcraft. Where is its origin?

As we can see in today’s world it is very popular that people and theoreticians are trying to find origin of some European culture phenomena beyond European soil. Usually that is very wrong and they should know that this type of analyzes is the last resort and we can use it if everything else fails and we don’t have any other ideas. However, that is very rare.

Because of that we can read in works of many authors that coven structure is imported from old Babylon or North Africa. Mainly they look some North African cults which were organized in coven ways and which came in Europe through Spain. Some of those cults were from Sufi traditions and other were more “pagan”. Those other cults were representing a mixture of old North African folk believes, dating from pagan times and young Islam from those regions. So we can hear that coven structure and even witchcraft per se was brought to Europe by Saracens and Moors. Why those authors didn’t look in Europe, we don’t know.

As usually the truth is much simpler and it was there the whole time. However, it’s not mystic and secret, so the whole history of origin of coven structure doesn’t look like some fairytale and that could disappoint many people. More even, truth could shock people, especially those who are “pagan” oriented. But because we don’t like to use imagination in serious writing we will tell only what we know for a fact about that issue.

Simply told, coven structure has its roots in Christianity. Of course, that coven of 13 members is one of the most usually formatted and it has its origin in Christian mythology and the story about Jesus-precisely told God and his 12 apostles. However, we do not need to understand this literally. Actually, coven structure has its origin in

Christian mythology but that doesn't mean that it has its roots in Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodox Church etc. Its real roots are in Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was syncretistic religious movements in antic times consisting of various belief systems mainly from Middle East, Greece, Egypt and North Africa in general. Through time, there were many Gnostics sects and variety of their teaching but all of them had some kind of connection with Christianity although some of them didn't believe in Christ and were preaching that he was a "mshiha kdaba" or "false messiah" who had perverted the teachings entrusted to him by John the Baptist. Other ones believed that Christ was embodiment of the Supreme Being who had been incarnated to bring "knowledge" to the Earth and people. Beside that some Gnostics sects were older than Christianity and they got their ideas from Old Testimony, Antic Philosophy, folk believes from their regions and later from Kabala and apocryphal literature and gospels. The truth is that Kabala developed its teachings from Gnostics not otherwise as many people think. Beside that Gnostics preserved and incorporated in their systems many esoteric believes, mysticism, magic, sex magic, sexual liberation, ritual practice, shamanism etc. from their regions.

In its early period one part of Gnostics had adopted idea that Jehovah has 13 virtues, from Hebrew's religion. We presume that that model was applied when a myth about God (actually, his emanation on Earth) and 12 followers was formatted. Beside that we know that Hebrew zodiac was well know in that time to the Gnostics and that the Biblical writers were familiar with the same system of constellations as the one we know today, except that name of the "Eagle" seemed to have been usually substituted for the "Scorpion".^f One interesting part says:

"The faces of the cherubim, in both Ezekiel and Revelation, are the middle signs of the four quarters of the Zodiac: the Lion is Leo; the Bull is Taurus; the Man is Aquarius, the Water; and the Eagle is Scorpio. St. John lists them here in counter-clockwise order, backward around the Zodiac; but when he uses them in the structure of his prophecy itself; he lists them in the direct order of the seasons. After the Preamble (chapter 1), the Revelation is divided into four quarters, each "ruled" by one of these creatures. The first quarter (Chapters 2-3) was ruled by Taurus; thus the emphasis on the Seven Stars, on the shoulder of the Bull. The second quarter (Chapters 4-7) is ruled by the figure of "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah," who has conquered to open the sealed Book. The Eagle flies in midheaven with cries of woe throughout the third quarter (Chapters 8-14). And the fourth quarter (Chapters 15-22) is governed by the Man, Aquarius the "Water-Pourer" (cf. the pouring out of the Chalice of wrath, and the River of Life flowing out from the Throne).

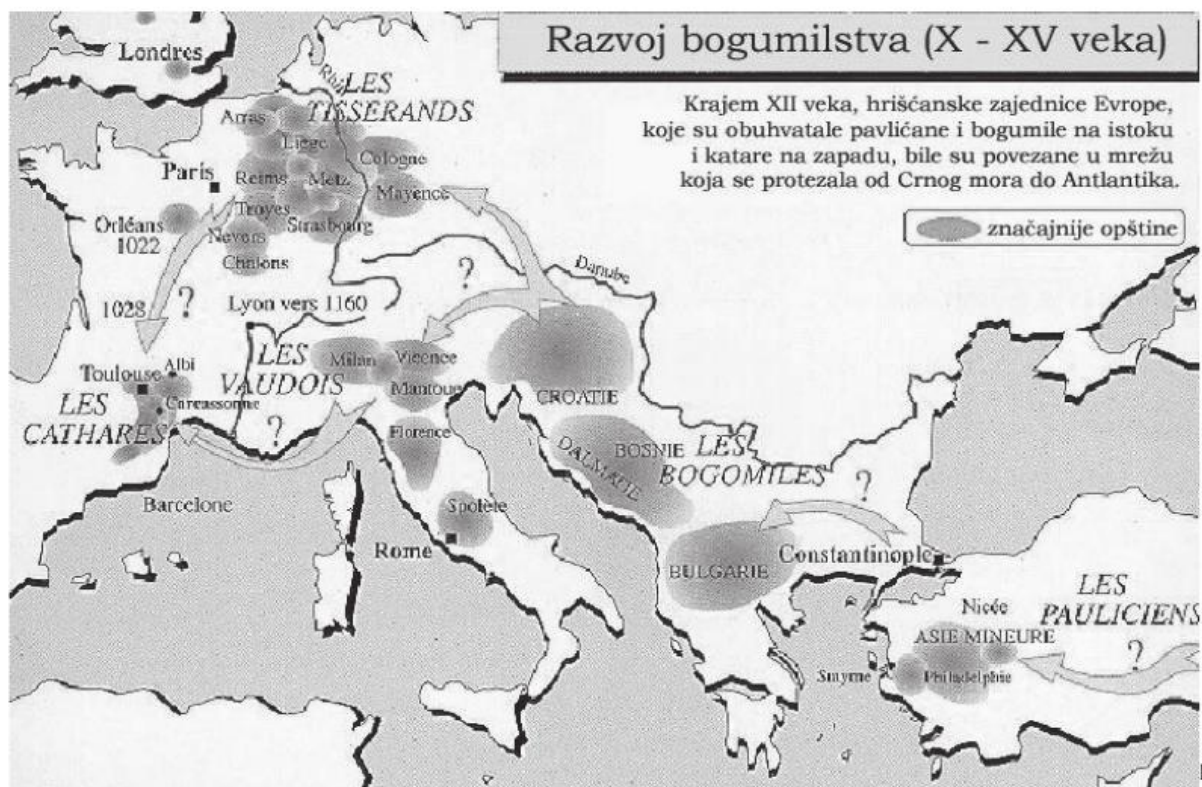
The arrangement of the twelve tribes of Israel around the Tabernacle (Numbers 2) corresponded to the order of the Zodiac; and, like the cherubim, four of the tribes represented the middle signs of each quarter: Judah was the Lion, Reuben the Man, Ephraim the Bull, and Dan the Eagle.”⁸

So before Christ was born we had 12 signs of zodiac and Sun in the middle of the system, which gives us number 13, again. In those times Sun could be representation of God itself. We can conclude that number 13 was sacred even before Christ was born. Later in that order we will get God in the shape of Christ and 12 apostles. Many Gnostics sects would take that type of organization especially for performing ritual practice. But still we don't have real covens until 10th century. That was just primordial base for formatting this type of organization structure. Question is: “What so important happened in the 10th century? The answer is this.

All Gnostics who existed in past we can divide in three groups, using the criteria of their existence in time. The first one would be Gnostic who lived before Christ. The second one would be Gnostics who lived during first several centuries after the Christ was born. The third groups would be Gnostics who were formatted and who lived in the Middle Ages, and what is most important, they were the ones from European soil. Actually they will spread their teachings almost trough all Europe and they will become deadly enemy for most European, in that time still young and weak, Churches. However, those churches will have their “stronghold” in states and kings or if you want in states politics. Famous Gnostics sects from that period were Bogomils, Paulicians and Cathars.

The most interesting groups for us here are Bogomils. Who are they? By scholars, they aroused in Bulgaria in Balkan somewhere around 927-970. That is correct, but only if you observe that précised moment, because in that time many of Balkan countries were under Bulgarian occupations. The truth is that Bogomils were formatted in the country known today as The Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia. Founder of the movement was certain priest Bogumil who was preaching this teaching around 950. in regions around towns Veles and Prilep.

This movement will spread very fast, mainly in two directions. Firstly its will occupy whole Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and region Dalmatia in today Croatia. After that one part will go on east to Russia and the other to Western Europe. In Western Europe Bogomilism will came through two directions. One was through east-Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Italy, France. Other one goes through west-Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and again to the France. From France this movement has spread to south-Spain and west to in England, which only few people know. Most of these movements we can see in this map.



Beside that, on the map, we can see that the names for them would be changed in foreign countries. So in France for instance they will become Chatars. Theory that Bogomils have its roots in Paulicians from Armenia is questionable. Yes they shared some similar ideas with them as with some other Gnostics too, but we think that they are self formatted in F.Y.R. Macedonia or Bulgaria in that time, if you wish. So what important happened in Balkan in the 10th century?

Well, Bogomils were very interesting group. Their teaching was a mixture of indoeuropean, pagans, christians and gnostics beleives. They were something like local patriots and they didn't want to spek Latin nor Greek. They didn't want to adoppt Christian Bysantin names and they perserved the old ones. Because of their „patriotism“ they perserved all folk beleives, magic, rituals and folk festivals. The best way to understand that is to read the folowing quotation in which Sinodic of Borila's acuse them:

“Those who in month in June on 21th day, the day when st.John baptist was born, do magic and pick plants; and on that night do mystery like Helenic rites; does who say that Satan created all things, and those who whit kumirs call up rain and great all things that come from Earth...”ⁱ

P.Kemp has concluded that Bogomilian doctrine has influenced people, as people's beleives have influence on their doctrine. Actualy, in Balkan, especialy in those times, shamanistic practice was very alive. Shamans were individuals, man and woman and

every village had at least few of them. Their most important obligation was to give their community medicine and magic help. They were healers, herbalists, clairvoyants and fighters against unnatural creatures, demons and weather. Beside that they were keepers of folk beliefs systems, myths, knowledge and wisdom. This type of solitary shamans was well known in the whole Europe. For instance in Norse tradition Völvas practiced seiðr, spá and galdr, practices which encompassed shamanism, sorcery, prophecy and other forms of magic and spell craft. Similar situation was in Germany and other European countries. In ancient times Greek and Roman witches had very similar appearance. All of these shamans share one several important things. All of them were shamans; they used ritual trance, dance, masks, animal body parts, plants etc. Their usual tools were magic knife, wand, cauldron, besom etc. Mainly they performed their rituals at nights because in shamanistic belief system that is the time when world of people and world of gods, spirits, demons and ancestors cross themselves. They performed their rituals at crossroads, graveyards, by the rivers and other, for them, important places. So they were dealing with magic and they were keepers of folk pagan myths and belief systems. They were classic shamanistic witches! However they didn't have spiritual goals, traditions that one person could initiate other, organized structure, group work etc.

Many of them will become Bogomils in Balkan. Bogomils and solitary shamans will exchange their teachings. Even further, Bogomils will incorporate all of them in their own teachings, and we know that for sure because many Bogomil's books are preserved even today. In Balkan those books are known as "knjige starostavne" which means that they were written long time ago. They are full of magic rituals, odd prayers, divination methods, astrology etc. Beside that we know for sure one more thing and that is that Bogomils didn't pay taxes and they refused to work. They started to live like those shamans, working as healers, herbalists, clairvoyants etc. They traded their services for food, animals, cloths or something similar.

In Balkan, government and Church had started to call them "Babajci", which means "people who follow grandmother's religion" and that was just other words for witchcraft. In Balkan, mainly old women were shamans and as we previously told, they were keepers of folk beliefs systems. So that nick name for them was quite appropriate.

Then something else happened. Bogomils refused to make differences between man and women. They became first feminists in history and they were for sexual liberation, because the gender was not important to them. Reason is that physical body is part of material world as well as everything around us. By their belief system all genders are in same position because all of them are in hell and hell is material world. So they looked at women as equal.

That was tremendous sin in Middle Age and in the eye of Church. Then they went one

step further. They organized their groups by old rules of “one God and 12 members” or one leader of procession and 12 participators, and they included women in those groups. Even more, women could lead some rituals as well. That was a moment when first covens were formatted as well as traditional witchcraft which we recognize today. Real traditional witchcraft is amalgam of old shamanism, folk paganism and Gnosticism. That was a moment when spiritual elements were incorporated in craft as well as spiritual goals. At the bottom line that was a moment when traditional witchcraft was born, too.

As we had the opportunity to see, Bogomil’s movement flourished very fast trough almost whole Europe. They were recognized as dangerous groups and governments of some countries started to prosecute them. They started to hunt those groups of 13 members at night, in abandoned churches, church graveyard etc. Of course, all of them were accused for practicing witchcraft. Later on, word “witch” and “witchcraft” would be thought as usual for descriptions of those groups and individuals in them. Even more, this word would be in use for describing solitary performers of magic-folk shamans as well. During the renascence many people will be persecuted although they wouldn’t have anything with any kind of witchcraft or Gnosticism.

So as we can see the coven structure has its origin in Gnosticism and it is from Christianity in general. First covens that looked like witch’s covens were born in Balkan among Bogomils because that was the time when women were included in them for the first time. Beside that Bogomils were responsible for connecting old European shamanism and Gnosticism, which will bring to world Traditional Witchcraft. This Medieval Gnosticism will spread itself all over the Europe and with it classical “coven” structure of 13 members. The first groups who will be persecuted will be from France-Orleans in 1022 and Italy-Verona in 1175. After that everything else is history.

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(Endnotes)

- a Judica Illes, “The Element Encyclopedia of Witch Craft”, Harper Collins Publishers, 2005, pp.330.
- b <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coven>
- c <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1O71-coven.html>
- d Margaret Alice Murray „Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology“, Kessinger Publishing, 2003.
- e <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coven>
- f <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac>
- g See the whole text at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac>
- h Map is from upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/83/Razvoj_bogumilstva.jpg. Picture is in public domain.
- i . P.Kemp, “Balkanski kultovi”, Luta, Beograd 2000, pp. 10. You can find this book in English under the following name; P.Kemp, “Healing Ritual: Studies in the Technique and Tradition of the Southern Slavs”, Faber and Faber Limited, 1935.

WUO BOOK REVIEWS

By Peter Paddon

Graeco-Egyptian Magick: Everyday Empowerment

By Tony Mierzwicki <http://hermeticmagick.com/>

Before I start, I should point out that Tony and I are in many ways the exact opposite of each other... Tony is a reconstructionist, and I most definitely am not. As a result, we do things very differently, and I just wanted to make that perfectly clear up front.

This book takes the Graeco-Egyptian Papyrae as its source material, and Tony uses them to great effect, along with other contemporary material, to recreate a system of Planetary Magick that really works. Trying to remain as true to the original as possible, this book lays out the basic info you need in order to make use of the Papyrae, and then plunges in to describe the practical and philosophical details behind every spell or prayer it covers. Laid out as a system of Planetary Magick, it is superior to the Ogdoadic Magick of Denning and Phillips due to its simplicity and potency.

Tony is meticulous, fastidious even, and the book is well-researched, well thought out, and places some obscure but important texts in the hand of the student, along with a firm and experienced guiding hand. Probably, like me, you will not want to reconstruct the rites and Mysteries exactly as they were - we prefer to bring something together that is timely and current. But even for the likes of us, this book is a valuable starting point. Tony gives precise instructions and, even if you go your own way later, you will find his helping hand... well... helpful.

To my mind, there are three ways of working the Ancient Mysteries: you can reconstruct them as you believe them to have existed historically, you can recreate them in modern form – the core Mysteries in a framework that is functional and relevant for today – or you can synthesize the Ancient Mysteries with elements of more modern, easily accessed Mysteries, such as Wicca or the Golden Dawn. All three are valid, and this is a fine example of the first option.

The book is published by Immanion, a small press that is garnering a lot of attention because of the quality of the books they produce. Tony himself is a warm and friendly guy, and if you get the opportunity to attend one of his lectures or workshops, I recommend them too. He is a real gentleman who happens to know his stuff. And he's willing to share.

Whether you are a reconstructionist or not, Tony's book is – as he says on the back cover – self-contained, and will be of value to anyone studying the Egyptian Mysteries. For

that matter, many facets of the Papyrae have made their way into modern Witchcraft, Hoodoo, and Pow Wow, so students of those Paths will find it equally of value.

RECOMMENDED

Visions of the Cailleach - Exploring the Myths, Folklore and Legends of the pre-eminent Celtic Hag Goddess

By Sorita d'Este and David Rankine <http://www.avaloniabooks.co.uk/>

You don't come across too many people who have a working relationship with the Cailleach, so when I discovered this book, I had to get it. And I'm glad I did, though with a few reservations. First, the good stuff...

It is obviously a labor of love, and the authors have done an excellent job of pulling together just about every bit of myth and lore that has found its way to the 21st century concerning this enigmatic Goddess. I was quite amazed at the quantity and quality of the folk tales from around the British Isles and beyond that were included. It served as an eye-opener that has certainly increased my understanding of the Storm Hag. But this is where I have my one small reservation about the book.

You see, that is where the book ends. There is no attempt to examine the stories, nor to look at what they might be saying from an esoteric perspective. Now this may be a deliberate choice on the part of the authors - after all, we occultists of whatever stripe are an ornery and individualistic lot, who like to form our own conclusions. But I for one would have liked to see some of their opinions and conclusions too, rather than just a collection of stories. Also, there is the tantalizing tidbit in the beginning, about the possibility of a sisterhood of the cailleach that may have existed in antiquity, which even hints that there may be more about this later in the book. But, alas, it is never revisited.

I have to say that I like this book, I think it is a good and useful book. But I have a sneaky feeling that it is about half of an even better book, one I hope will make an appearance in a later revision.

RECOMMENDED